

SECTION ONE: STRUCTURALISM FROM ABOVE

Claude Lévi-Strauss. Revisiting Structuralism in Anthropology

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Abstract. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) was an anthropologist of his own kind. He stumbled into the discipline as a young man, and gradually became the leading figure of French anthropology. His work took off from his own early fieldwork in Brazil (1935–39), and from the publications of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, the founders of French anthropology. During the Second World War, he lived in New York and found a new source of inspiration in the collections of Native American tales and worldviews, assembled by Franz Boas and his students. This moved him towards a comprehensive work on myths, and to his claim that all societies, tribal or modern, American, or not, were built upon the same structures. When back in France, he turned to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, and structuralism entered anthropology. Here it served to connect very different social organizations, landscapes, and continents, seeing them as versions of a shared basic structure. Lévi-Strauss' comprehensive humanism remains important in contemporary anthropology, even if 'structuralism' as such has faded.

Keywords: Classification, Myths, The Savage Mind, Environments, Racism

1. Introduction

Structuralism came to anthropology via linguistics; there was sufficient kinship between the two to make a transfer of ideas possible, even if they would take a new turn when moving into other fields. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) was a keyperson in the process of building up an anthropological version of structuralism, although

different versions of structural anthropology were also to emerge. Like other grand ideas it evolved through different disciplines and different minds and continued to do so until it had dissipated into new thought patterns. While never defining anthropology, being always a wide-ranging field of thought, structuralism did invigorate the discipline at a moment in world history, when it was no longer possible to claim the ethnographic innocence that had glued to the early decades of anthropological thinking. Lévi-Strauss very early distinguished himself by his claim that anthropology has a special, favoured place among the sciences.

The ethnographer, while in no wise abdicating his own humanity, strives to know and estimate his fellowmen from a lofty and distant point of vantage: only thus can he abstract them from the contingencies particular to this or that civilization. The conditions of his life and work cut him off from his own group for long periods together; and he himself acquires a kind of chronic uprootedness from the sheer brutality of the environmental challenges to which he is exposed. Never can he feel himself 'at home' anywhere: he will always be, psychologically speaking, an amputated man. Anthropology is, with music and mathematics, one of the few true vocations; and the anthropologist may become aware of it within himself before ever he has been taught it. (Lévi-Strauss [1955] 1961, 58)

This view of anthropology as unique among the sciences by being a true vocation provides an important sounding board for understanding Lévi-Strauss' position in anthropology; he was admired for his audacity in thinking, yet also strangely, and increasingly marginalised from main-stream anthropology. He contributed to important debates and introduced new vistas on the subject matter of the discipline. His work invigorated anthropology in important ways, yet his version of structuralism was on the edge of the discipline – as generally perceived – and produced some antagonism. Other versions emerged, less powerful and less radical, that would gradually fold in onto themselves, while Lévi-Strauss persisted in developing his grand structuralist thinking, increasingly on his own.

2. The Anthropological Landscape

In early 20th century there were three rather distinct schools of anthropological thinking, represented by Franz Boas (1858–1942) spearheading the American version, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) developing a French school, and finally Arthur R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) assembling a British anthropology that grew out of colonial interests on several continents. Together, these scholars formatted a new anthropological field, building also upon observations by others, who had worked overseas before ‘ethnography’ or ‘anthropology’ had appeared in the vocabulary. While the new generation spearheaded different schools of anthropological thinking, there was always a mutual interest – and a general acknowledgement also of earlier writers, be they missionaries or naturalists. The world had become one huge laboratory, opening up new intellectual paths. Sustained anthropological fieldwork was an important part of this often in the wake of missionaries, equally committed to a long-term engagement with ‘other’ people and their environments.

Lévi-Strauss, our protagonist, began his studies in philosophy but moved to anthropology for his doctorate, taking off from the French intellectual milieu while also increasingly affected by the early American ethnographic tradition. The latter was marked by detailed empirical studies of native Americans in particular, while also gradually looking towards other regions. When Lévi-Strauss entered the anthropological scene, the founders had set their mark on the discipline, and the world was undergoing rapid changes. New tools for generalization and comparison had to be invented to match new concerns. The work of the founders was often shaped by the colonial interests of particular countries, expecting anthropologists to unpack local social structures to facilitate relations. While keen to do fieldwork in the colonies (their being accessible), the anthropologists often went their own way intellectually, adding deeper analysis to documentation, once they found themselves among the people actually living there.

Lévi-Strauss’ vision of anthropology was originally influenced by his compatriots, not least Marcel Mauss, who had worked on

ethnographic material across continents (assembled by others) and introduced comparative analysis of world-wide themes, like magic, personhood, gifts, and habitus. Such generalising intellectual ambition differed from both British and American anthropology, where individual fieldwork was increasingly seen as a necessary way of entry to the discipline. While definitely an admirer of this practice, Lévi-Strauss questioned the “idea that empirical observation of a single society will make it possible to understand universal motivations”; here he speaks of Bronislaw Malinowski in particular, but the statement has a general bearing (Lévi-Strauss [1958a:19] 1967b, 14). Lévi-Strauss suggests that all “the historian or ethnographer can do, and all we can expect of either of them, is to enlarge a specific experience to the dimensions of a more general one, which thereby becomes accessible *as experience* to men of another country or another epoch” (ibid.17). History and anthropology do not differ by their subject, their goal or their method, but by their perspectives: “History organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations” (ibid.19). The reference to the unconscious is significant; no natives ever offer rational explanation of any custom or institution.

When he is questioned, the native merely answers that things have always been this way, that such was the command of the gods or the teaching of the ancestors. Even when interpretations are offered, they always have the character of rationalizations or secondary elaborations. There is rarely any doubt that the unconscious reasons for practicing a custom or sharing a belief are remote from the reasons given to justify them. (Lévi-Strauss [1958a, 25] 1967b:19)

It is in the unspoken that we shall find the deeper structural order, challenging any idea of a strictly empirical, localised anthropology. The inspiration from psychoanalysis is obvious, and in some of Lévi-Strauss’ essays on shamanism and sorcery, such as *The Sorcerer and his Magic*, the link between the two points of view is made explicit (Lévi-Strauss [1958c] 1967f). For him fieldwork was never a matter of collecting facts, but of analysing them; as opposed to British

empiricism and American hermeneutics, Lévi-Strauss took off in rationalist philosophy.

Lévi-Strauss found inspiration in other disciplines, like linguistics and psychology, or in other expressive genres, such as music and myth, and of course in the field. His own first fieldwork took place in Brazil in the mid 1930s, and while this was to set his thinking in motion, his impressive oeuvre also drew heavily on ethnographic material assembled by others, not least by American ethnographers focussing on worldviews, myths, and stories of the New World. The American interest was not only a result of his work in Brazil but also of the years spent in New York as a refugee from Europe during the Second World War. In New York he met Franz Boas and his students and collaborators and gained access to invaluable ethnographic reports on native Americans that were to play an important role in his structuralist project.

Already in 1937, Lévi-Strauss had suggested that ethnography was a revolutionary science, in the sense that it potentially offered new ways of thinking about social relations, thus expanding possibilities for social change also in the modern world (Lévi-Strauss [1937] 2016). One had to acknowledge that the so-called primitives were as old as the moderns, and like them they had run through different stages of development. This development included ancient high cultures in America, demonstrating a far from even path when it came to development. No doubt, Lévi-Strauss saw all of his ethnographic subjects as equal.

In the process of reassessing his work, and (re-) reading the many books *on* or conversations *with* Lévi-Strauss that were published during his later years and after his death – I have been overwhelmed by what I had not seen so clearly before, how his *structuralism* was never simply a ‘method’, ordering the world, but a deep commitment to seeing humanity as a whole. Lévi-Strauss lived long enough to (re-) interpret and subtly redefine his ambition as global realities changed. As a true intellectual, Lévi-Strauss kept expanding his thoughts, and his structuralism was never fixed to a particular set of terms or methods; yet it was always comprehensive, historically and geographically. He saw new things with age and time, keeping an eye on the actualities of global developments – politically and

ecologically. He started out as philosopher, but became an anthropologist by default, deeply affected by the multiplicity of the world and increasingly insisting that there was no ‘otherness’, just different versions of humanity across the globe.

3. Tristes Tropiques

Lévi-Strauss’ anthropological thinking took off in Brazil, where he was based in the years 1935–1939. He had been invited to work at the new University of São Paulo – inaugurated in 1934, and based on the Brazilian Academy, its predecessor. The Academy had been solidly rooted in a French intellectual tradition going back to Auguste Comte and more recently centring on Émile Durkheim’s work. Along with Lévi-Strauss, the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), who spearheaded a new history of mentalities, focussing on *la longue durée*, and showing how long-term structures formatted societies as much if not more than singular historical events (see e.g. Braudel 1981, 1982, 1984), was also invited. Lévi-Strauss may have found some inspiration from Braudel’s thinking, even if there is little indication that they became friends; rather the inverse. In fact, Lévi-Strauss did not have many friends, it seems; he often turned people down if they misunderstood him and from later biographies and published conversations with Lévi-Strauss, we sense a degree of irritation with colleagues who did not see the world eye to eye with him, and implicitly diminished his thinking. I once met him at College de France (around 1990), as president and emissary of the newly established European Association of Social Anthropologists, to ask him to accept an honorary patronage, which he declined. Along with me were a couple of colleagues, and of course we had an appointment; yet, after a few minutes, he withdrew rather ungallantly, “if that was all”. He possibly had had enough of such offers and wanted to think in peace; yet I did feel a bit let down. For me he was a hero, and a welcome antidote to (part of) my doctoral work in Oxford (in the mid 1970es), where Rodney Needham chaired colloquia on structuralism, strictly forbidding any mention of Lévi-Strauss, as I learnt soon enough; we shall return briefly to that below.

During his years in Brazil, Lévi-Strauss took time for fieldwork. He had arrived in 1935 in a state of intellectual excitement, feeling like the first travellers discovering a new continent in the 16th century: “For my part I discovered the New World. Everything seemed fabulous to me: the landscapes, the animals, the plants” (Lévi-Strauss & Eribon 1998, 34). Eventually, he would lament the unmistakable traces of the Old World that he found all the way to the interior of Brazil, where he made his first, relatively short fieldwork among the Bororo, collecting numerous masks and adornments that were to serve as the bottom-line for later exhibitions in Paris (*ibid.* 34–35). It was the beginning of his life-long engagement with masks, seen as a complex language in plastic form, exceeding the limits of a particular place or a particular people (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1979). Masks offer a kind of universal expression and reveal a human sub-consciousness of shared being.

Lévi-Strauss made three distinct campaigns into the interior of Brazil, asserting that fieldwork not only gave access to knowledge about particular tribes, but also contributed to a deeper sense of a common humanity that was not to be reserved for historians. The farther away the examples were from his own world, the more profound the gains of ethnography, Lévi-Strauss suggested, having invented a technique that made it possible to “integrate the enormous populations, the enormous part of humanity, into the history from where they had been completely excluded” (Lévi-Strauss [1937] 2016, 60). This exclusion was detrimental, he claimed, and went on to suggest that only through exchange and mutual interest would the small, sequestered groups develop and even survive. Human progress rests on contact, not isolation, even if just a contact with neighbours. Here is a first indication of why humanity had to be understood as one whole, and why concerted structural thinking had to replace simple documentation of ‘other people’.

To find general truths about humankind, one had to sometimes suspend the complex and deeply entangled histories of modern societies and look behind the curtain, as it were, to find the essence of human life. In low-density communities, the social phenomena presented themselves much more directly to the researchers’ gaze (Lévi-Strauss [1937] 2016, 44). While perceptively marginal

and barely known, the small communities in the New World were clearly part of a shared world with a very deep history. The alleged incommensurability between the life-worlds of Brazilian natives and Europeans did not hold up, as he was to discover. However new the world seemed, and however unknown its people, they were never outside of human history.

Arriving in the New World in 1935, Lévi-Strauss found himself in a state of exhilaration of discovering a continent, where everything was truly new to him. Nature itself sat the frame for his fieldwork among the natives, who were somehow part of it. While we cannot delve into his ethnographic work as such, we note how he understood ethnographic work as a profound dialogue, proposing that “the description of indigenous institutions given by fieldworkers, ourselves included, undoubtedly coincides with the natives’ image of their own society, but that this image amounts to a theory, or rather a transmutation, of reality, itself of an entirely different nature” (Lévi-Strauss [1958, 135] 1967e, 117). From his fieldwork among the Bororo, he coined the notion of each tribe living with a distinct *style*, expressed in their material culture, and repeated in clothing, body-painting, house-construction etc. (Lévi-Strauss [1955, 203ff] 1963, 160 ff.). His theory of style points towards an emerging structuralist thinking, abstracting larger patterns from quotidian practices, and identifying them athwart genres, languages and social organisations.

When later setting out to study the Nambikwara, further away in the hidden interior of Brazil, Lévi-Strauss was thoroughly disappointed by what he found. However far he penetrated into the jungle, traces of the Modern World were unmistakable; there was no hidden paradise of untouched savages. He recounts how he had gone to the end of the world to discover the barely perceptible advances of the earliest culture, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau had envisaged, but when confronted by reality, Lévi-Strauss refuted to place the Nambikwara on any historical scale (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 376 & 1961, 310). Whether the community was a remnant of an original culture or just a degenerated society, was immaterial. “I had looked for a community, reduced to its most simple expression. With the Nambikwara it had reached a level, where I only saw human beings”

([1955, 377] 1961, 310). In other words, there was no society and no origin, solely a fragile present within a larger, unfathomable world. The stress on *humans* implicitly includes the Nambikwara in a shared humanity. One result of this was that Lévi-Strauss distanced himself from the idea of bounded fieldwork among singular social groups with each their cultural pattern. They might differ, but all of them were part of a larger system of nature-cultures within which they unfolded, if never freely.

While *Tristes Tropiques* – the book – was widely read and in some ways acquired a cultic status in my generation of anthropologists (and beyond), there were sceptics, who could not see the value of a work that was both a travelogue, an ethnography, and a philosophical text. One of them was the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who was a grand writer himself, and who saw *Tristes Tropiques* as a mockery of anthropology, difficult to read “not just in the recognised sense that his by now famous rain-forest prose – dripping with steamy metaphors, overgrown with luxuriant images, and flowered with extravagant puns (‘thoughts’ and ‘pansies,’ ‘ways and voices,’ and perhaps, considering the text at hand even ‘tropes and tropics’) – is so easy to get lost in” (Geertz 1988, 27–28). Geertz’ translation of the puns hardly pays justice to Lévi-Strauss’ French finesse, but he has a point about the extravagance of the work; for Geertz it was a matter of finding a proper style in reverence for the anthropological metier. In the conversation on his work with Didier Éribon, Lévi-Strauss later admitted that he only wrote that way, because he found himself at a point in time where he had made a cut with his past and reorganised his personal life; and he had written *Tristes Tropiques*, which “he would never have dared publish if he had been in any competition for a university post” (Lévi-Strauss & Éribon 1998, 76). He did get a post later, and he enchanted many anthropologists (and others) with his free style of thinking, mixing personal impressions with pointed analyses.

4. Structural Analysis

Structural analysis as such was to some degree hidden among the leaves and landscapes of *Tristes Tropiques*, also hiding the indigenous peoples of the Brazilian interior. Yet, Lévi-Strauss' early attempts at organizing empirical facts from the field in larger schemes were soon to develop into 'proper' structural analysis, for which he became famous within and beyond anthropology. His first contribution to explicit structuralist thinking was published in 1945 in *Word. Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York*, and it bears all the marks of his high regard for linguistics.

Linguistics occupies a special place among the social sciences, to whose ranks it unquestionably belongs. It is not merely a social science like the others, but, rather, the one in which by far the greatest progress has been made. It is probably the only one which can truly claim to be a science and which has achieved both the formulation of an empirical method and an understanding of the nature of the data submitted to its analysis. (Lévi-Strauss [1945] 1967c, 29)

The growth of structural linguistics certainly affected anthropology, and vice versa. In his book, *Course in General Linguistics*, compiled by his students on the basis of their lecture notes, Ferdinand de Saussure explicitly stresses that linguistics borders on ethnology and, conversely, that anthropology may learn from language studies and their deep timeframe (Saussure [1916] 1974, 20 ff. & 223 ff.). Echoing this, Marcel Mauss claimed that "Sociology would certainly have progressed much further if it had everywhere followed the lead of the linguists" (Mauss [1924] 1951, 299), but he had no inkling of its future impact. As terms, ethnology, anthropology, and sociology were still semantically overlapping at the time, but we are in no doubt about the general agreement on the close relationship between anthropology and linguistics.

Once he had read Saussure, Lévi-Strauss began to see culture as a system of contrasting elements, like phonemes in language (Wilcken 2010, 11). Soon, Lévi-Strauss was absolutely certain that linguistics would eventually play "the same renovating role with respect to the

social sciences that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences” (Lévi-Strauss 1967c, 31). He identified the future revolution by reference to Nikolai Trubetzkoy and his programmatic statement (of 1933) about four basic operations:

First, structural linguistics shifts from the study of *conscious* linguistic phenomena to [the] study of their *unconscious* infrastructure; second, it does not treat *terms* as independent entities, taking instead as its basis of analysis, the *relations* between terms; third it introduces the concept of *system* ...; finally, structural linguistics aims at discovering *general laws* (Lévi-Strauss 1967c, 31).

Apart from taking inspiration from the general inspiration from the operational system of linguistics, Lévi- Strauss sought a way to take it further, suggesting that langue and culture were one whole. What mattered most to him was not the relation between language and culture as such, but the acknowledgment of their mutual constitution. This not only points towards conversations between people, but to a generic relation between language and culture.

Language can be said to be a condition of culture because the material out of which language is built is of the same type as the material out of which the whole culture is built: logical relations, oppositions, correlations, and the like. Language, from this point of view, may appear as laying a kind of foundation for the more complex structures which correspond to the different aspects of culture. (Lévi-Strauss 1967d, 67)

A main inspiration from linguistics came from Roman Jakobson (and others from the Praguean phonological circle). Lévi-Strauss met him in New York in the 1940es, where they began to follow each other’s courses; it was not until the 1970es that Jakobson’s lessons were published, and Lévi-Strauss was asked to write the preface, opening with the observation that a “book bearing Roman Jakobson’s name has no need of a preface” (Lévi-Strauss 1985c, 138). Lévi-Strauss notices that what had most affected his own thinking was Jakobson’s discussion of the phoneme; citing him, Lévi-Strauss says: “The important thing... is not at all each phoneme’s individ-

ual phonic quality considered in isolation and existing in its own right. What matters is their reciprocal opposition... within a system” (ibid. 140).

After the passage of years (between the lectures and the book), Lévi-Strauss recognized that among the themes in Roman Jakobson’s work, the phoneme has affected him most. It inspired his own view of incest: “Like a phoneme, a device having no meaning of its own but helping to form meanings, the incest taboo struck me as a link between two domains” (ibid. 142). More generally he claimed, that “Structural linguistics taught me... that instead of being led astray by a multiplicity of terms, one should consider the simplest and most intelligible relationships uniting them” (Lévi-Strauss 1985c, 139). Simplicity was not always easy, however, when it came to kinship structures.

In *Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté* (1949), written in New York, Lévi-Strauss mapped out diverse systems of marriage and exchange of spouses (based on existing ethnographies) and concluded that there were basically two kinds of marriage rules, elementary and complex; in the first, the choice of spouse was built into the system, in the second, it was reduced to a general duality of permitted or forbidden spouses. The incest-taboo was at the core of both systems, marking the boundary between nature and culture. From there, multiple systems of kinship had emerged. In Oxford, Rodney Needham, who had been deeply involved in the editing and translation of *Les Structures élémentaires*, took offence by a remark made by Lévi-Strauss’ on a minor detail in Needham’s introduction about preferential versus prescriptive rules. Needham had misunderstood that in Lévi-Strauss’ view, there was no difference in practice. Yet, Needham saw this as (indirectly) charging himself, the editor, with a ‘fundamental misunderstanding’ of the subject matter of the book (Needham 1969, xix) – whence the strict ban on mentioning Lévi-Strauss in his colloquia. Other British anthropologists continued to take inspiration from Lévi-Strauss; it was not a general warfare even if there was some puzzlement among anthropologists about the meaning of structuralism (see e.g. Hayes & Hayes 1970; Leach 1970; Goody 1977). There was, indeed, a fault-line between the very general principles and the actual social relations that could not be

effectively calibrated, even though kinship had been high on the anthropological agenda, not least in Britain.

Les Structures élémentaires, being a serious exercise in structural analysis across multiple societies and continents, never really took off beyond a rather narrow anthropological domain; it was too technical for the general public, and too muddled for many anthropologists. While ‘kinship’ had been a major issue in anthropology, it was soon to recede to back-stage; possibly it was both too general and too indiscernible. Yet, it did have a brief fame among French intellectuals, including Simone de Beauvoir, who in a review praised it as a token of the awakening of French anthropology; she saw it as an unexpected compromise between the questionable metaphysics of Durkheim and the narrow positivism of American Anthropology (Pace 1983, 10f). No doubt, structuralism was a huge intellectual impulse in France at the time; this gave Lévi-Strauss a lot of attention, even if he was a bit of a recluse.

Lévi-Strauss himself was an admirer of the USA, where he wrote the book on kinship based on written sources at his disposal while exiled in New York. Looking back at the work, what now is much more visible than it was then, is the larger discussion of the relation between nature and culture, addressed in the first chapter with the problem of incest at its centre, and implicitly present in the rest. One can see how he had been caught up in too many details to keep a clear analytical focus even in the 1970es. In the twenty-first century, when the categorical boundary between modern and traditional societies has all but disappeared, kinship *systems* are of limited interest to anthropologists – being hardly identifiable under the present global winds. In his preface to the Second Edition (in French 1967; in English 1969) he admits that “On reading the text today, the documentation seems tedious and the expression old-fashioned. If I had been more careful and less hesitant under the weight of my undertaking, I would doubtless have seen from the start that its very bulk would involve certain weaknesses, upon which, in fact, critics have dwelt with some malice” (Lévi-Strauss 1969b, xxvii). What is possibly more interesting than this lament is a statement about the book in a very different and much more general tune: “Once completed, the book becomes a foreign body,

a dead being incapable of holding my attention, much less my interest. This world in which I had so passionately lived closes up against me and shuts me out. At times it is almost beyond my comprehension” (Lévi-Strauss 1969b, xxvii).

When the English translation appeared, a reviewer wrote that the work could not “be ignored by any serious student of society, for its underlying subject matter is the nature of man and the definition of the human situation” (Murphy 1970, 164).

The contents of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* will be a source of surprise, and even dismay, to the prospective reader who thinks he is to be treated to an anti-Sartre polemic. The bulk of the tome is concerned with the custom of cousin marriage and, more specifically, with the cross-cousins. [...] Given the additional consideration that these forms of marriage occur only in remote and exotic societies, and only in a minority of them, one may wonder why Lévi-Strauss has become a culture hero of the established literati and the subject of a lead article last year in the *New York Times Magazine* (Murphy 1970, 166).

The play with kinship structures was actually a serious attempt at finding equivalents between distant societies and different regions, and at unpacking general structures. Looking back, Lévi-Strauss himself mentions a certain mathematical interest, but makes a stronger claim to have followed principles similar to those applied to linguistics by Roman Jakobson; in both cases one shifts the attention from the terms to the prevailing *relations* between the terms. “Or, that was exactly what I sought to do to resolve the enigma that the marriage rules pose to the ethnologists” (Lévi-Strauss and Éribon 2009, 79). We are back to linguistics and to the attempt at solving a riddle of shared patterns within an endless multiplicity of histories and cultures.

5. The Savage Mind

While, arguably, anthropologists think through the lives of people in particular places (if with different end-goals), Lévi-Strauss thought through categories, whether masks, myths, or kinship-struc-

tures. This thinking challenged established (positivist) ethnographic categories, calling for an invention of new ones. The translation of classic ethnographic material to general figures was part of his scheme. This is obvious in two works, both published in 1962, namely *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* ('Totemism today') and *La Pensée sauvage*, ('The savage Mind') the former seen (by himself) as a historical and critical introduction to the latter. Both seeks to penetrate further into the relation between the mind and the world. Together, they challenge the assumption of the primitive mind being a counterpoint to the modern; 'minds' are deeply connected, even if not equally presented.

Totemism is a specific mode of thinking that testifies to the connection between primitive and scientific classification, serving to identify particular social groups. Franz Boas, the founder of American anthropology, had suggested that mythical thinking seemed to have a "preference for animals, celestial bodies and other personified natural phenomena" (Boas 1940, 490; quoted by Lévi-Strauss 1962b, 178), and believed that it was easier to explain social relations through animals and other natural categories than through undifferentiated humans. For Lévi-Strauss the point was that species were not simply natural categories but human-made classifications, and he took classical Anglo-Saxon anthropology to task for suggesting that totemism was designed to protect certain, useful animals. Against such positivist view Lévi-Strauss wanted to emphasize that animals, and other living species like plants, were much more than useful and edible; they were also good 'to think'.

While totemism now seems to be an arcane interest, at Lévi-Strauss' time it was still part of a larger discussion of classification having evolved since Durkheim and Mauss published their work, *De quelques Formes primitive de Classification*, in *Annee sociologique* (1903). For the two authors, and for later anthropologists, the first task for anthropologists entering a new field was to apprehend the mode of classification that makes sense here. As suggested by Rodney Needham in his extended introduction to the English publication of Durkheim and Mauss' work, the anthropologist who is new to a particular field, "cannot pretend to perceive the phenomena involved in any entirely new way, but he can and must conceptualize

them in this foreign cast; and what he learns to do in each instance is essentially to classify” (Needham 1963, viii-ix). Classification is an important part of the formation of society; as Durkheim and Mauss have it: “to classify is not only to form groups; it means arranging these groups according to particular relations” (Durkheim and Mauss [1903] 1963, 8). As a system of classification “totemism is, in one aspect, the grouping of men into clans according to natural objects (the associated totemic species), it is also, inversely, a grouping of natural objects in accordance with social groups” (ibid. 17–18). In other words, ‘totemism’ was a way in which the anthropologist not only gained access to tribal organization but also the workings of the human mind, for whom the first categories would have been social categories according to Durkheim and Mauss (ibid. 82).

Lévi-Strauss claims that there is more to totemism than a logic of correspondence between two different groups, social and natural. Rather than a primitive form of classification, totemism is a way of thinking, and of *combining* natural and cultural series. This is where *La Pensée sauvage* takes over from *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, in a wider effort to uncover the complexity of human thinking. The question was still about what is given by nature and what is the work of the human mind, but the point of departure was that they were deeply implicated in each other. This question is equally addressed to anthropology working all over the world and to natural science. For Lévi-Strauss, all scholarship concerns ‘the concrete’, but does so at different levels of abstraction. A case is found in historical scholarship, having to choose (and navigate) between the details of daily life and the development over centuries. This always makes history a history for somebody (Lévi-Strauss 1962b, 341); historical scholarship, therefore, has no proper object and is nothing but a method. Here, ‘history’ is seen as the opposite of myth; where the latter ‘think’ themselves without any interference by an author, history, as authored in scholarship, is a method without an object.

La Pensée sauvage is an attempt at uncovering the workings of human thinking in general through a concerted theoretical effort at understanding how knowledge emerges. One of the major problems in discussing knowledge in this vein is to sort out what is given

by nature, and what is the result of human thinking. Clearly, this question applies equally to the natural and the human sciences.

Like other works in his impressive oeuvre, this one contains an important critique of the sciences, human and natural, failing to engage with the all-embracing question of what is owed to nature and what is the work of human thought. Lévi-Strauss is particularly committed to answering this question, which is at the centre of *La Pensée sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962b, Ch. One). As a thinker, Lévi-Strauss himself was in some ways a ‘savage’, refusing to abide to popular trends and obvious phrases when it came to address particular social or political issues – such as ‘race’. He had been called by UNESCO to speak against racism in 1952, having experienced it himself during the Second World War, when he had to flee Nazism in France; yet he chose to talk about multiple cultures but no obvious ‘races’, hoping to move the discussion away from biological categories to cultural differences; the latter were always changing (Lévi-Strauss 1973b, 379).

In 1971, he was again asked by UNESCO to address racism, and this time he went even further. While obviously declaring himself as a staunch opponent of any kind of racism in practice, he seriously questioned the suitability of continuing the use of a concept with roots in the nineteenth century. Locking ‘racism’ further up into the vocabulary might hide the fact that ‘cultures’ had always been dynamic. Politically, Lévi-Strauss abhorred racism, as experienced in Europe during the World War two, yet he insisted that the concept of race was not supported by anthropology, and as a biological category it was deeply questionable (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 21–48). He added a further argument against calling in anthropology to fight against racism per se, namely that humanity as a whole faced another major problem – embedded in its relations to other living species (ibid. 46). It is futile to seek a solution to the problem of race, if we cannot agree that ‘life’ in a broad sense unites us all. This is where we sense the deeper value of *La Pensée sauvage* (the book), with its motley of life-forms, understandings, and flowery language. If an aged experiment in thinking, it remains a source for wondering.

6. Mythical thinking

A tension between a philosophical and an empirical tradition colours his unsurpassed work *Mythologiques*, published in four volumes (Lévi-Strauss 1964; 1967a; 1968; 1971). They are thought out in a particular mode, marked by his deep interest in music, an interest that was later to be described in detail (Lévi-Strauss 1993). Here, Lévi-Strauss explores the relation between music and words (once again setting off from Roman Jakobson who had compared music to poetry), suggesting that the difference between music and words, was that the former was universal, while the latter rather more local, to put it briefly (*ibid.* 89). Music has no words, and the notes do not have any meaning of their own; only as it develops does a musical pattern emerge. This takes us back to *Mythologiques* where meaning is never given in individual myths but emerges in the process of ‘listening’.

Mythologiques takes off from his fieldwork in Brazil, more precisely in a Bororo myth, but as it develops it embraces an extensive Pan-American body of available myths from both South and North America – with excursions also to Europe and beyond. As Lévi-Strauss says in the first volume, *Le Cru et le Cuit* (‘The Raw and the Cooked’), he does not offer an interpretation or a translation of the myths, from one language to the other, but a generalization of their content. The myths have no author; they are incarnated in a tradition that may circulate in language, but which belongs to a separate order, where they think themselves (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 20). The first volume begins and ends with a musical analogy; both myths and music are absorbed through listening, and they awaken shared mental structures in the listeners wherever they live (*ibid.* 35). There is no obvious goal until we reach the end. It has been suggested that the musical framework shows a thinker in intellectual transition (Pace 1983, 10). There is also a kind of continuation, however, from *Les Structures élémentaires* embedded in the translation of actual social life to a general, all-embracing logic, that has neither been willed nor not willed. It just is. A comparable logic is found in the ‘culinary triangle’ (raw, cooked, rotten), being a pan-human scheme of consumption.

The second volume of *Mythologiques: De Miel aux Cendres* ('From Honey to Ashes'), has an explicit culinary framework, starting out from the striking interest for honey and tobacco known from all early civilizations and contemporary myths across the world. Again, Lévi-Strauss presents a voluminous catalogue of New World myths, but also includes some ritual meals from Europe, confirming the universality of certain sensorial facts. His analyses go to show how it is not the substances as such that are important, but their properties (Lévi-Strauss 1967a, 407f.). The ethnographic multiplicity, again, testifies to a universal order, which must be uncovered by the anthropologist in minute details – proving this universality, so to speak.

It also applies to the third volume, *L'Origine des Manières de Table* ('The Origin of Table Manners') that Lévi-Strauss seeks and finds links between myths of widely varied provenance. Here he introduces astronomic models in the analysis, expanding the field, so to speak, and adding to the claim that myths find themselves between nature and culture. He also suggests an interesting parallel between serial stories and myths, both drawing on common experiences and reshaping these along the way; the difference is that while the stories must end, the myths never can (Lévi-Strauss 1968, 11, 106). They have their own lives moving from one tribe to the next, floating through the ages, changing a little in response to particular natural environments, stellar bodies, and shifting resources for living and eating. The myths may be transformed and inverted, but always according to a structural logic; in other words, their emergence is far from random.

Arguably, one of the most interesting elements in Lévi-Strauss' mythological travelogue are his thoughts about his own role as author – and by implication any anthropological author. In the Finale to the fourth and last volume of *Mythologiques*, *L'Homme nu* ('The naked Human'), he describes the role of the author as fundamentally anonymous (Lévi-Strauss 1971, 559 ff.). As author, one has to let the myths simply run through oneself, in search of their own properties and ingrained order; one should not attempt to form them – which is not so easy to avoid, given the necessity to write them down, of course, and thereby to fix them in both time and space.

In a later retrospect, *Le Regard éloigné* (“The View from Afar”) consisting of a collection of articles, Lévi-Strauss elaborates on his view of the author (including himself) as passive and receptive, claiming that the author’s thought evolves in an anonymous place, where elements – barely seen to arrive from outside – can be organized; during the work with the text, the author is gradually excluded from his (or her) oeuvre and becomes its executor (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 327; 1985, 243). A similar claim can be made for the universal logic of myth, keeping the world together by connecting people within and across groups and between old and new worlds.

This logic is further demonstrated in the three additions to the mythological work that he later wrote, known as ‘les petits *Mythologiques*’, namely *La Voie des Masques* (“The Way of Masks”) 1979, *La Potière jalouse* (“The Jealous Potter”) 1986, and *Histoire de Lynx* (“The History of the Lynx”) 1991, where Lévi-Strauss pursues more detailed and located themes. Or so it appears; in actual fact he is also attempting to place such details in relation to the place of the earth in relation to the heavenly bodies, given the position of the constellation of stars in all human thinking, from its beginnings until now (Lévi-Strauss 1991, 320). Here the infinitely small connects with the boundless outer space, reminding us that the world is somehow beyond our reach.

When later looking back on the composition of his *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss saw how he had unknowingly taken over an idea from the surrealist Max Ernst (1891–1976) directed towards painting, and who had rejected the notion of the ‘creative power of the artist’. Authors likewise have a passive role in the poetic creation and become spectators to their own work. Lévi-Strauss asks if this does not also apply to his own studies of myth. Like the paintings and the collages of Max Ernst, he claims that his own work with mythology has also grown through samples taken from outside. In his case the myths themselves have been cut out from numerous images in old books where he found them, and then he “arranged them on the pages as they arranged themselves in my mind, but in no conscious or deliberate fashion” (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 327–28; 1985a, 243). With such deliberations we are deeply embedded in a particular version of structuralist thinking, developing in the course of writing.

While *Les Structures élémentaires* never really made it beyond a rather narrow, and relatively unforgiving anthropological debate on kinship-structures, the *Mythologiques* had a broader appeal to intellectuals from other fields, including visual artists. It also had a longer life in anthropology than the one on kinship structures, yet even so it seems rarely referred to in anthropology today, being possibly too esoteric and literary. One could argue that it still has an important message in connecting the Old and the New World (were it not already an archaic dichotomy), and not least in the insistence on a certain universality through a huge repertoire of specific myths and thoughts, inevitably structured by the interpreter's thinking. One might also claim that the logic of myth *is* structuralist and credit Lévi-Strauss for having proved it, but it is doubtful that such grand thinking will sometime again appeal to the many; yet once it made space for thinking globally – through minute details on the border between nature and culture. There is an urgent need for re-thinking this border, however, to which Lévi-Strauss' original thinking might still contribute, however much the world has changed.

7. Structuralism and Ecology

The major works in Lévi-Strauss' impressive oeuvre have naturally taken up the better part of the debate on structuralism in anthropology, as in my own presentations in this chapter as well as in Danish textbooks (Hastrup 1975, 2020a, b). Here we shall pursue his rather subtle view on the nature-culture connection, which has become alarmingly relevant, and – possibly – better understood today than ever before through its attempt at understanding the place of humans on the edge between them. Above, we saw how he highlighted this theme already in his UNESCO address in 1971, claiming that nature united all humans for better and for worse.

In 1972, he gave a talk in New York on 'Structuralism and Ecology' at Barnard College. He opened by recalling his first lecture there, some 30 years earlier, when he found all the girls knitting while he lectured on the Nambikwara Indians, and he had a distinct feeling that they were utterly unconcerned with what he said. Yet, some did listen as proved by one of the girls coming up to

him afterwards, saying “that it was all very interesting, but she thought I should know that *desert* and *dessert* were two different words” (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 8; 1985, 102). This left him dismayed, but it also showed “that in these remote years I was already interested in ecology and mixing it, at least at the linguistic level, with the culinary art to which I did turn much later for exemplifying some of the structural ways along which the human mind works” (ibid., 9). Thus he turned a linguistic lapse into a theoretical objective.

He continued to refute allegations of idealism or mentalism and claimed that he was “only trying to probe the structure of the human mind and to seek, what they disparagingly call ‘Lévi-Straussian universals.’ If this were the case, the nature of the cultural context in which mind operates and manifests itself would become unimportant” (ibid.). One understands his heavy sigh, given that he had, indeed, followed the script and worked closely with minute details of the environment, be they ecological, meteorological, botanical, ornithological or celestial, allowing him to assert the huge impact that ecology had upon the mind, and vice versa. On the other hand, it took detailed fieldwork to sort out the principles by which particular people would endow some of them with significance and leave others behind. As he wrote in *La Pensée sauvage*, “the principle underlying a classification can never be postulated in advance, it can only be discovered *a posteriori* by ethnographic observation – that is, by experience” (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 58). Detailed ethnographic work allows us to see how the mind works with its natural environment; to cultivate this productively within a larger scholarly field, a close collaboration between the natural and the human sciences is essential (Lévi-Strauss 1985, 104).

Let us follow Lévi-Strauss’ into his own field in Brazil in the 1930es, where forests were mostly too tangled to be even ‘seen’, making people disappear within them. When arriving to people in the dense rainforest, Lévi-Strauss was overwhelmed by the very obscurity of the settlement and reflects back also on others:

So profound, and yet also so confused, are one’s first impressions of a native village whose civilization has remained relatively intact that it

is difficult to know in which order to set them down. Among the Kaingang – and the same is true of the Caduveo – extremes of poverty inspire in the traveller an initial weariness and discouragement. But there are societies so vividly alive, so faithful to their traditions, that their impact is disconcertingly strong, and one cannot tell which of the myriad of threads which make up the skein is the one to follow. It was among the Bororo that I first encountered a problem of this sort. (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 198).

The problem was to identify the details, for “these houses were not so much built as knotted together, plaited, woven, embroidered and given a patina by long use” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 198). They were therefore a more or less incomprehensible structure in the jungle, which Lévi-Strauss only understood when he “proceeded to ‘settle in’ in the corner of the huge hutment, where I did not so much take in these things as allow myself to be impregnated by them. Certain details fell into place” (ibid. 199).

A similar development can be seen in his response to nature that always offered particular sensations and spurred certain reflections. Lévi-Strauss relates how crossing and re-crossing the desert-like savannas of central Brazil “had taught him to appreciate anew the luxuriant Nature beloved of the ancients: young grass, flowers, and the dewy freshness of brakes” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 335). Yet, wherever he went, the world had to be re-interpreted, and he lamented the way in which Europeans had settled for less than the dense forest, having scaled down passions to what was within reach. Nature became part of his life in an unexpected way, and his intellectual interest awakened. We can see both of these processes in the following observation, where he laments (part of) the historical development in Europe, where the sense of nature had weakened while societies had progressed.

But in that forced march we had forgotten the forest. As dense as our cities, it was inhabited by other beings – beings organized in a society which, better than either the high peaks or the sun-baked flatlands, had known to keep us at a distance: a collective of trees and plants that

covered our tracks as soon as we had passed. Often difficult to penetrate, the forest demands of those who enter it concessions every bit as weighty, if less spectacular, than those exacted by the mountains from the walker. Its horizon, less extensive than that of the great mountain ranges, closes in on the traveller, isolating him as completely as any of the desert's empty perspectives. A world of grasses, mushrooms, and insects lead there an independent life of its own, to which patience and humility are our only passports. A hundred yards from the edge of the forest, and the world outside is abolished. One universe gives way to another – less agreeable to look at, but rich in rewards for senses nearer to the spirit: hearing, I mean, and smell. Good things one had thought never to experience again are restored to one: silence, coolness, peace. In our intimacy with the vegetable world, we enjoy these things which the sea can no longer give us and for which the mountains exact too high a price. (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 335)

The initial sensations of a radically different landscape, compared to his European upbringing mainly in cities, indisputably contributed to Lévi-Strauss' thinking. His fascination with the New World never ceased, something that had earlier happened to Alexander von Humboldt (1851). In both cases the landscape made a new kind of imagination possible, and for both of these pioneers (if in each their way and each their century), it opened up for a new way of thinking through connections, multiplicities, and infiltrations in and of natural entities. In the case of Lévi-Strauss, this stands out clearly in *Tristes Tropiques*, but has not always been appreciated as we saw in Geertz' review above. There is no doubt, however, that the bodily experience of the tropical landscape contributed to his understanding of ecology as something more than an outer nature.

In 1998, Lévi-Strauss was interviewed by Didier Éribon about his long life in anthropology. The conversation turned into a book, where Lévi-Strauss cannot, and does not want to hide his deep sentiments about America. For him, the first impression of the contact with the New World remained ineffaceable; in the New World everything was on an incommensurable scale compared to that of the Old World. Adding to this was the stunning nature, being both more pristine and more grandiose than elsewhere; nowhere else had Lévi-Strauss met with a nature where even the wildest appearances

covered the patient work of humans over centuries, even millennia (Lévi-Strauss and Éribon 1998, 83–84). When looking back on his fascination with the New World he expands on his view of America, seeming to have been a permanent source of reflection, and much more so than any other continent.

Finally, and this is possibly the main reason, the study of no other continent asks for a similar advantage of the imagination. America was essentially populated by people hailing from Asia, traversing the lands that had emerged at the present place of the Bering Strait. But when? The best estimates vary by a margin of 50 million years. And of these repeated passages over different epochs, there is no trace. Because of the variations of sea-level, the itineraries are probably lost either in the high mountains or under the water. And this is not all: America offers a stupefying spectacle of very high cultures neighbouring each other, on a very low technological and economic level. What is more, these high cultures never knew anything but an ephemeral existence: Every one of them was born, developed, and disappeared in a matter of centuries; and those that had disappeared before the arrival of the Spanish were probably more knowledgeable and more refined than the ones now seen in their decline, but nevertheless dazzled them. (Lévi-Strauss and Éribon 1998, 84)

Lévi-Strauss concludes that in truth and in spite of all the accumulated work over a long time, we still do not understand what made America. There is an unfulfilled dream of solving the riddle, like the 19th century scholars hoping for the next find to offer the solution. “This is what renders Americanism so captivating” (ibid. 85).

We can see how Lévi-Strauss engaged with landscapes that were unknowable as wholes but afforded such richness that could not but influence his dreaming; it also fertilised his view of the relations between all living beings. In answer to allegations that his structuralism was overly intellectual, he claimed that it “recovers and brings to awareness deeper truths that have already been dimly announced in the body itself; it reconciles the physical and the moral, nature and man, the mind and the world, and tends toward the only kind of materialism consistent with the actual development of scientific knowledge” (1985a, 119). This is a grand claim, but he had hopes

that neuroscience would eventually confirm what seemed apparent within his own work, teeming with empirical knowledge that sustains his argument. He adds:

The so-called primitive cultures that anthropologists study teach that reality can be meaningful on the levels of both scientific knowledge and sensory perception. These cultures encourage us to reject the divorce between the intelligible and the sensible declared by an outmoded empiricism and mechanism, and to discover a secret harmony between humanity's everlasting quest for meaning and the world in which we appeared and where we continue to live – a world made of shapes, colours, textures, flavours, and odours. Structuralism teaches us better to love and respect nature and the living beings who people it, by understanding that vegetables and animals, however humble they may be, did not supply man with sustenance only but were, from the very beginning, the source of his most intense aesthetic feelings and, in the intellectual and moral order, of his first and even then profound speculations. (Lévi-Strauss 1985a, 119–20)

This takes us back to ecology as a growing concern in his work, and like any other concern calling for a deep commitment to empirical work; anthropology is, above all, an empirical science. Individual cultures can be understood only through painstaking attention. “Only an almost slavish respect for the most concrete reality can inspire in us confidence that body and mind have not lost their ancient unity” (ibid. 119). The challenge for Lévi-Strauss' version of structuralism has not primarily been to honour this respect, but to convince other scholars that structuralist anthropology could not be practiced piece-meal. It required a deep commitment to a larger vision of humanity as embroiled in more-than-human ecologies.

8. Wild Thinking

When Lévi-Strauss landed in the Bay of Rio in Brazil (in 1935) he did not at first see the landscape and the beauty of its components. As a man of reading, he saw through others' eyes, and he recalled Columbus who wrote about this place:

The trees were so high that they seemed to touch the sky; and, if I understood aright, they never lose their leaves; for they were as fresh and as green in November as ours are in the months of May; some were even in flower, and others were bearing fruit... And wherever I turned the nightingales were singing, accompanied by thousands of other birds of one sort or another. (Columbus, quoted in Lévi-Strauss 1963, 84)

Lévi-Strauss comments: “That’s America: the continent makes itself felt at once”. He adds the observation that America is made up by a manifold of presences, shapes, movements, and patches of light that the newly arrived will not be able to single out or even see. For the newcomer these shapes do not stand out in their individuality. “No: it all strikes him as an entity, unique and all comprehending. What surrounded me on every side, what overwhelmed me, was not the inexhaustible diversity of people and things, but that one single and redoubtable entity: The New World” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 84). Imagine a time, when one could still confidently think of the New World.

Lévi-Strauss is very explicit about his relative pleasure in different landscapes. He does not like the sea; he feels diminished by the mass of water that robs him of more than half his universe. What is more, “It seems to me that the sea destroys the normal variety of the earth” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 332), offering only monotony and sameness. He prefers mountains to the sea, although admittedly, “my feelings did not extend to the *high* mountains.” Their delights are physical, almost abstract, drawing one’s attention “away from the splendours of Nature and entirely engrossed by preoccupations relating rather to mechanics or geometry” (ibid. 333). The landscape of lower mountains, preferably with pastures, is much more to his liking. He surmises: “If the sea presents, in my opinion, a landscape many degrees below proof, mountains offer, by contrast, a world in a state of intense concentration” (ibid. 333–334). While the sea offered only a lifeless surface, the climbs and the shifting, often narrowing vistas offered in the mountains invited him to a kind of conversation. And yet, he eventually had to admit that

... although I do not feel that I myself have changed, my love for the mountains is draining away like a wave running backwards down the sand. My thoughts are unchanged, but the mountains have taken leave of me. Their unchanging joys mean less and less to me, so long and intently have I thought them out. (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 334).

The reason I find these thoughts worth sharing is to illustrate how Lévi-Strauss appropriated different landscapes in a very personal, and emotionally charged (if always checked) language. They also clearly mark his calling as an anthropologist, seeking to embrace both culture and nature.

While there is little left of structuralism as such in anthropology today, Lévi-Strauss must still be credited for having opened up important ways of thinking about the anthropological project. He not only theorized the nature-culture relation he also operated on a scale that connected minute local details with major global structures, and he saw actual social events within the long-term development of the human mind. If his thinking is in some sense wild, his writings are often poetic, refusing to abide to conventional, linear arguments. Clifford Geertz took him to task for his free style, which for Lévi-Strauss was part of the argument against any linear thinking that would hide the scale of the matter, as it had first appeared to him in the Tropics.

The Tropics are not so much exotic as out of date. It's not the vegetation which confirms that you are 'really there', but certain trifling architectural details and the hint of a way of life which would suggest that you had gone backwards in time rather than forwards across a great part of the earth's surface. (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 91)

These remarks, as well as the language of which his works are so full, made Patrick Wilcken call him *The Poet in the Laboratory* (Wilcken 2010). This is to the point, not only by referring to the actual language but also to the mediation between humanities and sciences.

Revisiting structuralism in anthropology has made me realize, that while it was an important inspiration one or two generations ago, it has more or less evaporated in anthropology – at least as of

contemporary interest. Yet, writing this chapter has convinced me (once again) that Lévi-Strauss' singular contribution to anthropological thinking keeps standing. Not only did he signal a change in our view of humanity, but also insisted that anthropological analysis always reached beyond located empirical knowledge; here it is worth remembering how Lévi-Strauss declared having taken inspiration from three particular domains of thinking, viz. geology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism before he became an anthropologist (Lévi-Strauss 1961, 59–62). All of these domains work on 'truths' below the surface, as does structural anthropology.

Lévi-Strauss' legacy to a large academic field and to general intellectual concerns is widely appreciated; his life history was long and expansive and remains impressive (see Loyer 2015). Today, and in defiance of older criticisms of his work as severed from reality, I see his oeuvre as an outstanding contribution to a comprehensive humanism, anchored in an all-inclusive view of the world, where nature and culture are deeply infiltrated.

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Author's note

All direct translations from French in the text are by the author. The list of references often gives both a French and an English version if accessible – the latter being used in quotations above. There is no absolute consistency, however, given problems of access to either originals or translations in some cases. Thanks are due to the two reviewers, whose careful readings and astute comments helped improve the chapter.

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