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Lévi-Strauss: What Legacy?

More than fifty years after the first edition of *Structural Anthropology* and forty years after the last volume of *Mythologiques*, it is time, it would seem, to address the question of Lévi-Strauss's legacy. After four decades of poststructuralist, postmodernist, and postcolonial critique, it would appear that Lévi-Strauss's stock has been permanently delisted from American academia's fashion-driven marketplace of ideas. If the word "poststructuralism" itself, with its barbarous consonance, its prefix and ending, already appears outmoded, so "twentieth century," what about structuralism itself? When the death of Lévi-Strauss was announced in November of 2009, how many discretely remarked: "Was he indeed still alive"? Thus, the question "What is Lévi-Strauss's legacy today?" is one whose accompanying shrug already constitutes an answer, as if it were the ultimate concession to an important episode of twentieth-century thought, to which one must pay pious homage before moving on to something else.

However, it is possible that this question—whether it is purely rhetorical or whether it testifies to a sincere desire to "save" a part of Lévi-Strauss's œuvre—might not be the one we should be asking. It is based on a set of postulates concerning the progress of knowledge in the social sciences, as well as on the status of anthropological works and of anthropological knowledge itself. As soon as we begin to unpack these postulates and make them explicit, it becomes clear that they are far from self-evident. Rather than considering the question of Lévi-Strauss's legacy, it might perhaps be better to ask whether we can do anything with Lévi-Strauss today. Indeed, there is a simple factual response to this question. As it happens, more than a quarter-century of relative silence, there has been, since the mid-1990s, a

resurgence of interest in Lévi-Strauss's texts, particularly in France, England, and Brazil, which has given rise to numerous interpretations and analyses across a variety of disciplines. This return is quite meaningful in itself: Michel Foucault used to say that physicists do not reread Galileo and Newton, since such a reexamination "could alter our knowledge of the history, but not the science, of mechanics."[1] That Lévi-Strauss is being reread both within anthropology and outside it, however, surely indicates that his œuvre is not truly outdated like that of Newton. Perhaps the famous "paradigm shift" that made the structuralist project appear as exotic and as baroque as the Phlogiston theory of chemistry never actually occurred; perhaps we have only begun to grasp the true implications of this project.

These new readings of Lévi-Strauss are multifaceted, multivalent, and, as one might expect, heterogeneous. While it is impossible to synthesize them all, I will attempt to draw out the principal orientations.

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The question of Lévi-Strauss's legacy can be considered from two perspectives: that of the history of the discipline of anthropology and that of the history of "theory," of which structuralism is considered an episode. The first perspective thinks in terms of disciplinary knowledge, the second in terms of supersession and radicalization. The first questions whether Lévi-Strauss's sources were reliable and whether or not recent discoveries invalidate past conclusions; it defines the present through its difference from the past and situates itself "after Lévi-Strauss." The second conceives of Lévi-Strauss as the initiator of a movement that has since been superseded; it speaks of poststructuralism or situates itself "beyond structuralism." These two approaches are legitimate as far as they go, and they still form the basis of many works on Lévi-Strauss today. Let us be clear: they appear to me to be the two methods for considering Lévi-Strauss in the United States; and this explains to a great extent why contemporary re-readings of structural anthropology have so little impact in the U.S., as well as why these re-readings circulate in exchange networks that skirt North America and are thus deprived of the

1. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 135–36.

immense sounding board that is the American university system and its publishing industry.

Let us first consider the perspective of disciplinary history. There is, without a doubt, a Lévi-Straussian legacy in anthropology. It is not that of a type of practice, such as that of Bronisław Malinowski, who provided ethnography with its foundational charter (at least in the Anglophone world), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, as well as with a distinct method, namely participant observation. It has, however, bequeathed a number of conceptions and perspectives that have been integrated into the discipline's common set of principles and methods. For example, even the ethnographer the most assiduously concerned with establishing the concrete conditions of enunciation of Native American myths (which Lévi-Strauss was sometimes accused of neglecting in *Mythologiques*) knows that a myth can be considered as the combinatory variant of another in the context of a regional whole—a major component of Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology. On another point, *The Savage Mind* bequeathed to the discipline the idea that observable differences in the sensible world can serve as sources for a logic of the concrete, enabling it to "tinker" [*bricoler*] with meanings, without the need to postulate a mental, collective, or individual subject that imposes its formal constraints on the content. Philippe Descola has noted that this idea was "such an obvious one" for "all of those who have worked on representations of the environment" that one no longer "mentions one's debt" to Lévi-Strauss on this point, which is now part of the public domain of contemporary anthropology.[2] One could adduce many other such examples.

In a more general and deeper sense, Lévi-Strauss has bequeathed to anthropology a type of approach that has been routinized (even to the point of being shopworn), which consists in studying the relevant differential features, allowing for the revelation of "necessary relations [that organize] certain sectors of social life": i.e., mythical narrations, culinary techniques, clothing customs, the exchange and circulation of marriage partners, etc. In its most stripped-down version, structural analysis thus consists in "an extremely efficient method for detecting and ordering regularities in utterances and practices."[3] It is this method that was adopted and applied to all sorts of cultural and textual objects in the course of the ephemeral "structuralist" vogue in the 1960s and 1970s in France, all while obscuring two of its essential dimensions. First, structural analysis has no *a priori* generalizing potential. It is not some global "analysis-grid" that one can simply "apply" to any object; it is very effective when it is brought to bear on certain aspects of social life, less effective in other cases, and utterly useless in still others; if it is found to be fruitful, it is the very process of investigation that allows one to determine these domains *a posteriori*. Secondly, structural analysis only possesses explanatory power if the system of differences it highlights is compared and connected to other systems—in other words, there is no "structure of the work," for example, nor is there a "structure of the text"; every structure presupposes a plurality of objects that can be designated as "structured" only because they are in a relationship of variation, one from the other.[4]

Finally, one can recognize a Lévi-Straussian legacy that does not affect anthropology in its entirety, but that is nevertheless foundational to a large part of the discipline. Indeed, even if they distance themselves from Lévi-Strauss and refuse to be labeled "structuralists," a great number of anthropologists work according to principles that Lévi-Strauss's œuvre has consolidated and strengthened. Philippe Descola summarizes this tendency thus: "the conviction that the task of anthropology is to elucidate the apparent variability of social and cultural phenomena by shedding light on minimal invariants [. . .] whose function most often follows unconscious rules"; "the hypothesis that these invariants are founded on material determinations" of an external order (environmental constraints) or internal order (sensory-motor equipment), as well as "on certain transhistorical imperatives of social life"; "the precedence accorded to synchronic over diachronic analysis, not because of a rejection of the historical dimension, but because of the rejection of the empiricist position, which

2. Philippe Descola, "Sur Lévi-Strauss, le structuralisme et l'anthropologie de la nature," *Philosophie* 98 (2008): 24. (All non-attributed translations in this essay are by the translator.)

3. Ibid., 9–10.

4. See Patrice Maniglier, "Des us et des signes. Lévi-Strauss, philosophie pratique," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 1 (2005): 101–102. In this sense, despite his critiques of Lévi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu was able to qualify his own approach as "structural anthropology" (see for example, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* [Paris : Fayard, 1982], 41–42). See also Bourdieu's tribute to Lévi-Strauss in the preface to his *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

consists in accounting for the genesis of a system prior to defining its structure."[5]

Nevertheless, we must recognize that, unless one is oneself an anthropologist, it is difficult to determine with any greater precision the specifically disciplinary legacy of Lévi-Strauss. This is something we need to keep in mind when we seek to draw out the implications of the question of Lévi-Strauss's legacy. Indeed, any attempt at superseding structural anthropology requires first that we determine and circumscribe, once and for all, its domain of validity. Yet this condition is, on the one hand, very difficult to satisfy in practice, and relies, on the other, and above all, on an erroneous view of the progress of knowledge in anthropology.

This condition is difficult to satisfy in practice because anthropology is *de facto* a specialized field, about which only the specially trained can speak with authority. It is certainly legitimate to ask about the legacy of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*; there are indeed numerous contestable and contested assertions in this work that are of a variable degree of generality: from the ethnographic "data" and facts marshaled by Lévi-Strauss to the universality of the incest prohibition, via the opposition between prescriptive and preferential marriages or the fact that women are the ones exchanged.[6] However, the sheer fact that *The Elementary Structures* is still an object of discussion today suffices to forestall any final verdict on its obsolescence or relevance: the jury is still out; and taking part in the debate presupposes an entry fee, namely the integration of the considerable body of theoretical and technical knowledge that has been accumulated in the anthropology of kinship over the past century. One can apply the same reasoning to the structural analysis of myths, which also continues to be the object of interdisciplinary discussions that are quite technical,[7] as well as to the more properly ethnographic

observations in Lévi-Strauss's work: unless one is a specialist of the history of exchanges between tribes of the West coast of Canada, it is difficult to assess Lévi-Strauss's hypotheses in *The Way of the Masks* regarding the meaning and allocation of the swaihwé and xwéxwé masks of the Salish and Kwakiutl; unless one is a specialist in the social organization of native tribes in the Brazilian plateau, it is difficult to speak authoritatively about the interpretation of the structure of the Bororo or Kayapo villages and its relation to indigenous cosmology. It can be noted in passing that the ability to make such observations has nothing at all to do with the question of whether the anthropological discipline is "truly scientific"; it is a fact that anthropology *progresses*—not because it mercilessly sheds its blinding light on some of the most neglected aspects of human societies, but simply because its practice is cumulative and because anthropologists read one another's work.

But this progress is not linear. Behind the question of Lévi-Strauss's legacy often lies the idea of a rectilinear and unidirectional development of knowledge, such that what was relevant at one time ceases automatically to be so as soon as new work on the same objects emerges. Such a model is no more valid for anthropology than for the other sciences; unpredictable phenomena of return and rehabilitation can be observed in, for instance, biology. For example, Marcela Coelho de Souza has demonstrated that if one deemphasizes the opposition between nature and culture in the introduction to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which does not in fact have any substantive value in Lévi-Strauss, it is susceptible to a reassessment that gives the work a new relevance—this despite the objections, first from British "descent theory," but especially from three decades of "fire of critics from culturalist, practice theory, and feminist perspectives, among other tendencies that entered the anthropological scene from the seventies onwards." We thought we had seen "the demise of kinship itself as an anthropological concept," but "the news of its passing had been premature."[8]

5. Descola, "Anthropologie structurale et ethnologie structuraliste," in *Une école pour les sciences sociales. De la VIe Section à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales,* ed. Jacques Revel and Nathan Wachtel (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 140.

6. For an assessment and classification of the objections to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship,* see Françoise Héritier, "La citadelle imprenable," *Critique* 620–21 (1999): 61–83.

7. See in particular: Lucien Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strausss. Le déploiement d'une intuition* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998); *The Double Twist: From Ethnography to Morphodynamics,* ed. Pierre Maranda (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Emmanuel Désveaux, *Quadratura americana: essai d'anthropologie lévi-straussienne* (Genève: Georg Editor, 2001).

8. Marcela Coelho de Souza, "The Future of the Structural Theory of Kinship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Claude Lévi-Strauss,* ed. Boris Wiseman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 80. Descola and others have often noted the extreme privilege given to the first pages of *The Elementary Structures* and to what appears (but only appears) to be a reification of the opposition between nature and culture. See for instance, Descola, "Sur Lévi-Strauss, le structuralisme et l'anthropologie de la nature," 14–16.

Moreover, one could also observe that, with the notable exception of the anthropology of kinship, the critiques of structural anthropology coming from within anthropology itself have rarely been based on the supersession of assertions rendered obsolete by the progress of knowledge or by the gathering of new empirical data. On the contrary, it is almost always with regard to the fundamental, philosophical questions of epistemology or of disciplinary definition, sometimes even of ethics, that Lévi-Strauss has been criticized; and one could add to this the charge, most often made in the American academy, that Lévi-Strauss's field practice was neither extensive nor sufficiently rigorous. With a few rare exceptions, Lévi-Strauss did not respond to these criticisms. One of the most famous polemics in which he did take part—a debate with Marvin Harris after the Gildersleeve conference of 1972—reveals, on the contrary, that he addressed a controversy only when it involved the very specific realm of ethnographic facts: the discussion was not at all centered on the definition of structure, nor even on the relations between environmental constraints and social organization (all of which are abstract questions of social theory that only philosophers seek to resolve *a priori*), but on the identity of bivalves (clams or horse clams) mentioned in the bella bella versions of the Kawaka myth and on the question of the dietary use of these clams' siphons by the natives of that region.[9]

In other words, the reception of structural anthropology is marked by an essential paradox: from the outset it has almost always been read as a "school of thought," which made it imperative to understand its initial axioms (sometimes before deducing its fundamental biases: logocentrism, rigid dualism, universalist rationalism, surreptitious metaphysics, etc.). And yet, when we look at the facts, structural anthropology was conceived—both theoretically by Lévi-Strauss himself, but also and first of all, historically, during structuralism's gestation period in New York in the 1940s—not as an explanatory schema (which would have followed evolutionism, functionalism, etc.) but as an original *method* aimed at solving specific problems that arose in the practice of anthropologists: it is because he wanted to provide the anthropology of kinship with a way out of the endless quarrels about classification that Lévi-Strauss sought to consider

kinship terms through an analogy with phonemes; it is because he wanted to resolve the "totemic problem" (that is, the recurrence in a considerable number of societies of the idea of a relation between men and animals, a recurrence that anthropologists were unable to account for in any satisfactory manner) that he borrowed from structural linguistics the idea that "it is not resemblances, but differences which resemble each other";[10] it was because he wanted to respond to the "crisis of anthropological knowledge" (anthropology was at one time threatened by a rift between the accumulation of ethnographic data that was increasingly dispersed and comparative syntheses that were increasingly fragile) that Lévi-Strauss introduced structural analysis as a new tool of intercultural comparison.[11]

There is therefore something surprising in Clifford Geertz's critique of Lévi-Strauss. Geertz speaks of an "intraprofessional suspicion that what is presented as High Science may really be an ingenious and somewhat roundabout attempt to defend a metaphysical position, advance an ideological argument, and serve a moral cause."[12] The polemical advantage of such a description is clear: it allows Geertz to play the (responsible) role of the pragmatic, matter-of-fact practitioner who refuses to be intimidated by theoretical elaborations. Yet, it is paradoxical to present such suspicion as *professional*, given that the "philosophical" affirmations that one finds in the work of Lévi-Strauss (in which Geertz claims to recognize the "universal rationalism of the French Enlightenment")[13] are really peripheral to a body of work that is primarily grounded in a disciplinary tradition and that dedicates itself to the resolution of problems—which are often quite technical—inherited from past anthropological inquiry. Despite its "high theory" reputation, in practice structural anthropology relies upon a scrupulous attention to ethnographic content and the problems it poses, as well as upon an "almost maniacal deference for the facts."[14]

9. Marvin Harris, "Lévi-Strauss et la palourde," *L'homme* 16 (1976): 5–22. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Empiricism" [1976], in Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985/1992), 121–37.

10. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 77. Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui* [1962], in *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2008), 522. See Frédéric Keck, *Lévi-Strauss et la pensée sauvage* (Paris: PUF, Philosophies, 2004), 34–37.

11. See Gildas Salmon, *Les structures de l'esprit: Lévi-Strauss et les mythes* (Paris: PUF, 2013).

12. Clifford Geertz, "The Cerebral Savage" [1967], in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1973), 347.

13. Ibid., 356.

14. Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*, trans. Sylvia Modelski (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982), 145.

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The other perspective from which Lévi-Strauss's legacy—as well as his supersession—has been viewed is that of the grand narrative of postmodernism. I shall not dwell on this perspective, which one mostly finds in literature departments, and which conceives of structuralism as an avant-garde movement that followed existentialism before being swiftly superseded in turn. According to this narrative, after the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, the "first" Foucault (*The Order of Things*) and the "first" Barthes (*The Fashion System*), came the poststructuralism of Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, the "second" Foucault (*The History of Sexuality*) and the "second" Barthes (*The Pleasure of the Text*). After a philosophy of structure came a philosophy of the event and of difference. After the rationalist faith in systems and grammars came the resistance of texts and the subversive work of writing. Many authors have noted the flawed character of this presentation, given that, for instance, on either side of this supposed rupture, we find the very same thinkers. As Jonathan Culler astutely remarks: "When so many of yesterday's structuralists are today's poststructuralists, doubts arise about the distinction."[15] One can indeed go even further: as Patrice Maniglier observes, the fact that the same authors "embraced the 'structuralist' cause and led the polemic against it [. . .] often for the same reasons" is an index of structuralist identity: structuralism is not defined by a set of theses, nor by a shared method or common program, but rather as a problematic site. In other words, one must adopt a structuralist perspective in order to grasp the unity of structuralism: structuralism does not position itself beyond or above "the dispersion and distribution of works and authors"; it consists "not in a common trait, but in the matrix of their divergences" and in the reconfiguration of the "pertinent divides" around which "the essential alternatives are distributed."[16] Thus, it is not a matter of a historical sequence leading from the subjective freedom of existentialism to the objective necessity of structures, followed by a return of the subject and its agency. Rather, it consists in a subterranean displacement in the manner of

15. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 25.

16. Maniglier, "Les années 1960 aujourd'hui," in *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France*, ed. Maniglier (Paris: PUF, 2011), 16–18.

thinking such abstract notions as causality, comparison, or the sign—a displacement in which the theses of numerous authors as well as various moments of their work are situated.

In any event, the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss was associated in the academic imaginary with a kind of "hard" or scientistic sort of structuralism, that of Saussurean linguistics and the phonologism of Jakobson and Troubetskoï. It was conceived as an ambitious attempt to extract the "codes" determining human actions and discourse. Beyond their "early" twentieth-century odor and the image of good old-fashioned science they evoked, the common element shared by these thinkers supposedly consisted in the privileging of *langue* over *parole*, system over its elements, structure over the subject, and synchrony over diachrony. In the works of these scholars, these contrasted pairs (which, in certain cases, they had conceptualized themselves, and which, it must be said, are in no way superimposable) have an instrumental value; yet, curiously, they were accused of excessively privileging the first terms, which for a run-of-the-mill history of ideas, could only provoke dialectically the "revolt" of the second terms: the subject against the structure, history against the system, meaning (interpretation) against science, performance against grammar, and so on. Structuralism was thus quickly blamed for being "incapable of dealing with heteroglossia, plurivocality, ambiguity" and for having "reduced the task of interpretation to the act of decoding."[17] But that is a flawed understanding of its project. Structuralism never tried to determine "what makes people do what they do" or "what makes people say what they say," but to determine under what conditions their actions and words can have meaning. There is no need, therefore, to accuse structural analysis of reductionism and of neglecting ambiguous acts and utterances, since its concern is to precisely determine what makes them appear ambiguous in the first place. The genealogical link between Saussure, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss is incontestable, but it is not at all based on the priority of the "system" to the detriment of history or the subject; rather, it seeks to shed light on a "liminal problem common to all 'sciences of culture,'" namely the difficulty of identifying what constitutes an

17. E. Valentine Daniel, "Culture/Contexture: an Introduction," in *Culture and Contexture: Readings in Anthropology and Literary Study*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), 9.

observable fact (respectively, a sign, a phoneme, a usage). The structural method resolves this difficulty when it highlights the correlated variation of two series of differences.[18]

It is nonetheless useless to try to clear up such confusions or to rectify such a narrative, if only because of its performative efficacy: the creation of an imaginary "structuralism"—that is, in the words of Edward Said, "formalist, authoritative, claiming to domesticate the moving force of life and behavior" in its "system"[19]—allowed for the development of many fruitful reflections on the production of meaning within political and cultural power structures. This historical narrative is one effect among others in the circulation and relocation of concepts and reflections within varied intellectual traditions and academic environments: from positive knowledge (linguistic and anthropological) developed within the European tradition, to French philosophy, to the American academy, which has adapted these reflections according to its own theoretical and political preoccupations.[20] Thus structuralism appeared almost immediately in American literature departments (and as a result, of course, in other university contexts where English is the dominant language of "theory") as a synonym for the authoritarian violence of systematic science, which ultimately essentializes and naturalizes the historical and political constraints on thought and on the production of discourse. It was perceived as the ultimate incarnation of Western, logocentrist science, and was accused of seeking to establish a relation of "mastery" over its objects, that is, of constructing an imaginary overarching or external perspective relative to an object that it seeks immediately to dominate by separating it from itself.[21]

Among the factors contributing to these misunderstandings, one can note a particular contingency of dates: in the area of literary studies (the case of anthropology is different, given that Lévi-Strauss had interlocutors in American anthropology since the 1940s), Lévi-Strauss was imported to the United States through Jacques Derrida's

conference paper "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" given in 1966 at the famous colloquium held at Johns Hopkins University entitled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man." This paper has since been considered as embodying the advent of poststructuralism. Yet, at that time, the only works of Lévi-Strauss that had been translated into English were *Tristes Tropiques* (in an incomplete version) (1955, tr. 1961), the first volume of *Structural Anthropology* (1958, tr. 1963), and *Totemism* (1962, tr. 1964). The translation of *The Savage Mind* appeared the year of the colloquium. In other words, before even being read, Lévi-Strauss is presented in the United States as a precursor, whose œuvre has already been glossed and superseded. This would have paradoxical consequences for the reception of both authors. With regard to Lévi-Strauss, as Derrida had well perceived, one can consider that true structuralism only began with a radical desubstantivation of the nature-culture opposition; this was in fact already present in *The Elementary Structures* but was only made explicit in *The Savage Mind*; for many commentators today, it is the latter book, along with the "large" and "small" volumes of *Mythologiques*, that best illustrate the analytical power of structuralism.[22] With respect to Derrida, his 1966 paper (which further develops his earlier critique of Lévi-Strauss's "Rousseauism," in the journal *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, later included in *Of Grammatology* (1967) was less about denouncing the putative logocentrism of anthropology than about *siding with* Lévi-Strauss against the Althusserian structuralists and their pretense of founding a science that was untouched by both the ambiguities of writing and violence.[23]

In any case, it is largely a shared conviction that, since the advent of poststructuralism, we have now been cured of "the great illusion—the modern phantasm—of theory" once embodied by Lévi-Strauss:

18. Manglier, "Des us et des signes," 93. See Gilles Deleuze, *How Do We Recognize Structuralism?* trans. Melissa McMahon and Charles Stivale, in Stivale, *The Two-Fold Thought of Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Guilford, 1998).

19. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Invention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 379–80.

20. See François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

21. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 222–25.

22. See Viveiros de Castro, "Xamanismo Transversal: Lévi-Strauss e a Cosmopolítica Amazônica" in *Lévi-Strauss: Leituras Brasileiras*, ed. R.C. de Queiroz & R.F. Nobre (Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2008), 79–124. Also see the readings of Manglier and Salmon, the latter of whom prefers to talk about "structural functionalism" in reference to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. The phrase "small *Mythologiques*" is used by Lévi-Strauss to designate his late analyses of Native American myths (*The Way of the Masks, The Jealous Potter, The Story of Lynx*).

23. See the excellent study by Edward Baring, "Derrida and the Cercle d'Épistémologie: How to be a Good Structuralist," in *Concept and Form, Vol. II: The Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London: Verso 2012).

"the assumption that theory faithfully represents the real." Structuralism tried "to convince us that the only existing reality is the one that theory claims to provide through its interpretive grid, outside of which no other reality can exist," but its ultimate goal was to avoid "the confrontation with reality": "in order for the model to function, one must eliminate anything that draws attention to the empirical character of facts."[24] Two things can be pointed out regarding this grand narrative: on the one hand, it reestablishes the schematic dualism between empirical reality and theoretical model, form and content, which all of the structuralists, from Lévi-Strauss to Deleuze, via Foucault and Barthes, had set out to overcome; on the other hand, it surreptitiously reintroduces the teleology of philosophies of consciousness. It no longer consists, as in the positivist narrative, in a linear progression of knowledge that leaves structuralism behind, but rather in the implacable—albeit unexplained—progress of postmodern lucidity.

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Though its presuppositions are not always addressed, the question of legacy is thus the underlying question that determines for the most part, even today, the reception of Lévi-Strauss. However, in the last fifteen years, particularly in France, England, and Brazil, one can observe what one could call a return to structuralism in the flowering of a group of texts and analyses that have resurrected the work of Lévi-Strauss, without thereby posing the question of legacy.

   If one had to assign a historical origin to what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has called the "second spring" of the literature on Lévi-Strauss,"[25] one could certainly point to two series of events. First, there was the successive publication of the last two works of Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx* (1991) and *Look, Listen, Read* (1993). In a certain way, these two short books, written by a man more than 80 years old and signed "Claude Lévi-Strauss, of the Académie française," could have appeared as somewhat outdated, the final sparks of an anthropological reflection from an earlier age and nearing extinction. Yet in another way, they revealed astonishing contemporane-

24. Josué V. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary: Theorizing the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 25, 20, 218.
   25. Viveiros de Castro, "Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*," *Gradhiva* 8 (2008): 131.

ity: on the five-hundredth anniversary of the conquest of the American continent, *The Story of Lynx* combined the structural analysis of mythical Native American material with an ethical reflection on alterity and violence; the work presented itself both as an extension of *Mythologiques* and as an expiatory homage to the systems of thought of the North American natives. *Look, Listen, Read* not only brought together considerations on art that had hitherto been scattered in isolated digressions and articles; this short book also completed the work of Lévi-Strauss through an aesthetic theory that is as organically linked to his anthropological reflection as the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is to Kant's Critical Philosophy.[26] Calling on Rameau, Diderot, Batteux, and Kant, this book offered a kind of "Lévi-Strauss in the eighteenth century" (as in the title of the famous issue of the 1966 *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, which contained, among other texts, Derrida's reflection on the lesson of writing), allowing Lévi-Strauss this time to distance himself from Rousseau. It inscribed structuralism in a long history, giving it some unexpected interlocutors, all while clarifying, through examples, the connection between perception and the structural activity of the human spirit. Finally, without breaking with the ethnographic grounding of structural anthropology (*Look, Listen, Read* ends with reflections on sculpture in the Tsimshian and Tlingit populations), the book established new entryways into the work of Lévi-Strauss through a dialogue with figures well known to the general public: Proust, Ingres, Rimbaud . . . In fact, the two works were unexpectedly successful, appearing as they did in the wake of the first general synthesis of Lévi-Strauss's œuvre, by Marcel Hénaff.[27]

   Around the same time, in anthropology, an important current of Americanist ethnology was being developed (which was in fact closely related to the reflections on Native American dualism in *The Story of Lynx*) that revisited the Lévi-Straussian opposition between consanguinity and the marriage alliance (which itself represents a particular expression, in the realm of kinship, of the nature/culture opposition). Basing their conclusions on Native American cosmology—for which the nature/culture dichotomy has no privileged status, nor indeed even any relevance—these studies aimed to create a

26. I am borrowing this analogy from Martin Rueff, "Notice de *Regarder écouter lire*," in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, 1919, 1931–1937.
   27. Marcel Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology*, trans. Mary Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 [Fr. 1991]).

kind of radical structuralism, one that was entirely "relationist" and desubstantivized.[28] In the wake of these studies, there have been recent reflections on animism and perspectivism—no doubt one of the most remarkable developments that anthropology has seen in the past few years, not only because they respect the tension in the discipline between theoretical ambitions and a grounding in ethnography, but also because these debates are, strictly speaking, *anthropological*, after many years during which anthropology seemed to be caught between two fates: postmodern narcissism, on the one hand, and the threat of its absorption by other disciplines (cognitive science or history), on the other. [29]

This return to structuralism was inaugurated by another, specifically French event, that is, the special issue of the journal *Critique* devoted to Lévi-Strauss (1999), in honor of his 90th birthday.[30] It was the first time that one could perceive a change in the cultural status of Lévi-Strauss's work—a change that was confirmed nine years later by the publication of a volume of his work in the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, a collection that had previously welcomed only writers and philosophers. In addition to several contributions that offered a historical reevaluation of Lévi-Strauss's work, this special issue of *Critique* also contained reflections by historians and musicologists, writers and essayists (Jacques Deguy, Pascal Quignard), who had little interest in "applying" structuralism to their respective domains. From this point forward, Lévi-Strauss emerged as a "classic": it suddenly became clear that his œuvre—read and re-read, distilled and solidified in scattered citations—forms the mental accompaniment of numerous authors and lends itself to myriad uses in a variety of fields unconcerned by the hackneyed debates on structure and the subject. During this period, Lévi-Strauss made a short and famous speech, in which he compared himself to a "broken hologram,"[31] thus inaugurating a ten-year period, during which, under the specter of an aging Lévi-Strauss, the number of studies dedicated to his work steadily increased.

While it would be impossible to enumerate them all, we can highlight three collective endeavors that contributed to this reevaluation: the publication of the voluminous *Cahier de l'Herne Lévi-Strauss*, edited by Michel Izard (2004), the *Cambridge Companion to Lévi-Strauss*, edited by Boris Wiseman (2009), and, one year earlier, the aforementioned 2000-page volume, entitled *Œuvres*, which appeared in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series. The success of the Pléiade book was quite unexpected, when one considers the difficulty of most of the texts included. It also has a special authorial status. In a certain sense, one can legitimately regard it as Lévi-Strauss's last work, since he himself selected the contents and,[32] most of all, because he annotated and modified certain passages of his works, particularly the end of *The Savage Mind*.[33] In another sense, by proposing a critical edition based on the study of his manuscripts and accompanied by an abundance of historical annotations and annexes, this collection confirmed Lévi-Strauss's change of status; Lévi-Strauss no longer appeared merely as a professional anthropologist or as the leader of structuralism, but rather as an "author," and more specifically, as a "founder of discursivity," according to Foucault's famous formula, which referred to figures such as Marx and Freud.[34]

To these three collective enterprises, one could add the innumerable monographs and special journal issues that were published in three successive waves: those published around 2000; those published at the time of the Lévi-Strauss's 100th birthday; and the tributes that followed his death in 2009: la *Revista de Antropología* in 1999; *Archives de Philosophie* in 2003; *Les temps modernes* in 2004; *Esprit* in 2004 and 2011; *Philosophie* in 2008 . . .

A cultural sociologist would have noted a generational effect. It is incontestable that these works reflect, in some respects, a "post-

28. Viveiros de Castro, "The Gift and the Given: Three Nano-Essays on Kinship and Magic," in *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered*, ed. Sandra C. Bamford and James Leach (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 237–67.

29. See among others: Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, trans. Catherine V. Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Ameridian Perspectivism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4 (1998): 469–88; Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005); Bruno Latour, "Perspectivism: 'type' or 'bomb,'" *Anthropology Today* 25/2 (2009): 1–2.

30. *Critique* 620–621 (1999).

31. Notes from Roger-Pol Droit, *Le monde*, January 29, 1999.

32. The selection surprised commentators because it did not include many of Lévi-Strauss's most famous texts and because it was centered on a later period of his work (post 1975). For an interpretation of this choice, see Vincent Debaene, "Préface," in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, xii-xviii.

33. See Frédéric Keck, "Notice du *Totémisme aujourd'hui* et de *La pensée sauvage*," in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, 1804–1810, and Keck, "*La pensée sauvage* aujourd'hui. D'Auguste Comte à Claude Lévi-Strauss," in *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France*, 113–24.

34. On this point, see Debaene, "Préface," in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, xxii–xxxi.

poststructuralism," in both senses of the term. On the one hand, these are the product of researchers who are part of an intellectual landscape that is no longer polarized by structuralism (whether by an opposition to structuralism or by a concern for its supersession by poststructuralism). In any case, whether we are speaking of a renewal, a re-reading, or a return, this "second spring" presupposes the end of structuralism, that is, a theoretical discontinuity between then and now. It will be interesting to someday trace the history of this rapprochement between our time and this "philosophical moment of the 1960s."[35] This generational effect appears, on the other hand, through the fact that these works almost always historicize Lévi-Strauss. Notwithstanding the specifically biographical studies, the general aim was to better read and understand Lévi-Strauss by reconstructing the contexts in which his work developed and the problems it endeavored to address: his œuvre has been resituated within the French intellectual tradition and university system;[36] the study of totemism and the savage mind has been reinscribed within the history of the question, which is both philosophical and sociological, of the relationship between logic and affectivity;[37] his theory of symbolism has been redefined as a response to the crisis of philosophical transcendentalism that was latent in the 1930s and became manifest after 1945;[38] *Tristes tropiques* has been resituated within the history of French ethnographic writing and within the internal development of Lévi-Strauss's œuvre;[39] new light was shed on the foundational links between structuralism and the ethnography of the South-American lowlands—Lévi-Strauss's initial area of specialization;[40] the connections between structural anthropology and the symbolist aesthetic tradition, previously ana-

35. For an initial diagnosis, see Maniglier, "Les années 1960 aujourd'hui," and "The Structuralist Legacy," in *The History of Continental Philosophy, Volume 7: After Poststructuralism: Transitions and Transformations*, ed. Rosi Braidotti (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 55–82.

36. Christopher Johnson, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Formative Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

37. Keck, *Lévi-Strauss et la pensée sauvage*.

38. Claude Imbert, *Lévi-Strauss, le passage du Nord-Ouest* (Paris: L'Herne, 2008).

39. Debaene, *L'adieu au voyage. L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

40. Anne Christine Taylor, "Don Quichotte en Amérique. Claude Lévi-Strauss et l'anthropologie américaniste," in *Cahier de L'Herne Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Michel Izard (2004), 92–98. Carlos Fausto et Coelho de Souza, "Reconquistando o campo perdido: o que Lévi-Strauss deve aos ameríndios," *Revista de Antropologia* 47/1 (2004): 87–131.

lyzed by James Boon, have been newly illuminated;[41] the role of Lévi-Strauss's American exile within the genealogy of structuralism has been redefined;[42] the (seemingly simplistic) anti-racism and relativism of the two lectures, *Race and History* (1952) and *Race and Culture* (1971) have been reinterpreted in light of the political education of the young Lévi-Strauss and of the ideological shifts of Unesco;[43] new perspective has been given to the 1960s debates among structuralism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics around the question of meaning and symbolism;[44] the method of transformation, first used in *The Savage Mind* and later in *Mythologiques*, has been thoroughly reinterpreted as a way out of the crisis of anthropological comparativism, brought on by American ethnology at the beginning of the twentieth century;[45] structural anthropology has been resituated within a genealogy of structuralism, as a response to an ontological problem, that of the identity of the sign.[46]

Some anthropologists regretted this historicization of Lévi-Strauss's œuvre; they perceived it as an "embalming" and a "fossilization" that would eclipse or neglect the still vibrant theoretical power of Lévi-Straussian thought.[47] Not every attempt at historicization is conservative, however; it does not necessarily signify a patrimonialization or a salvage operation. On the contrary, by varying the contexts and by increasing the number of narratives in which the œuvre of Lévi-Strauss is inscribed, these recent works have revitalized structuralism in two ways. First, they have introduced an internal difference. Indeed, many of these analyses have revealed that structural

41. Boris Wiseman, *Lévi-Strauss, Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

42. Laurent Jeanpierre, "Les structures d'une pensée d'exil: la formation du structuralisme de Claude Lévi-Strauss," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 28/1 (2010): 58–76. Debaene, "'Like Alice through the Looking Glass.' Claude Lévi-Strauss in New York," *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 28, number 1 (2010), 46–57.

43. Wiktor Stoczkowski, *Anthropologies rédemptrices. Le monde selon Lévi-Strauss*, (Paris: Hermann, 2008).

44. Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss, le passeur de sens* (Paris: Perrin, 2008).

45. Salmon, "Du système à la structure," in *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France*, 159–76.

46. Maniglier, *La vie énigmatique des signes. Saussure et la naissance du structuralisme* (Paris: Leo Scheer, 2006); Maniglier, "Des us et des signes."

47. Emmanuel Désveaux, "Claude Lévi-Strauss, Œuvres," *L'homme* 190 (2009): 199–201. See my response to his objections: Vincent Debaene, "La Pléiade en débat. Réponse à Emmanuel Désveaux," *L'homme* 193 (2010): 45–50.

anthropology is not a coherent and monolithic doctrine whose principles are to be accepted, rejected or overcome. Rather, it is a discursive space riddled with tensions: for example, there are tensions between two uses of the nature/culture opposition;[48] between two forms of moral and epistemological skepticism that do not overlap;[49] between, on the one hand, an "irenic" definition of the social as a system of signs, and, on the other, the repeated affirmation that symbolic systems are still only partially convertible into each other—that is to say that far from reducing social life to the simple implementation of a "grammar" determined from the beginning of time and whose rules the anthropologist is supposed to elucidate, structural anthropology integrates the double possibility of freedom and violence.[50] Furthermore, several of these studies reveal the fecundity of Lévi-Strauss's thought for anthropological, philosophical, and aesthetic reflection, as well as for contemporary politics. In that case, it is no longer a question of revealing an internal tension within Lévi-Strauss's thought, but rather of using it to think new problems, to rethink the old ones in a new way, or to question some of our received categories. A single example will suffice: if the aesthetic thought of Lévi-Strauss seems to hesitate between modernism and anti-modernism, it might not be the symptom of an internal incoherence so much as the sign of the insufficiency of these notions—however conventional—whose descriptive capacity is in fact quite limited.[51] The resurgence of Lévi-

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48. Descola, "The two natures of Lévi-Strauss," in *The Cambridge Companion to Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 103–117.

49. Stoczkowski, *Anthropologies rédemptrices*, 305–326.

50. Maniglier, "La condition symbolique," *Philosophie* 98 (2008): 37–53.

51. One could make the same remark about the recent readings that oppose a "poetic" tendency to a "scientific" one in Lévi-Strauss and that believe to have unmasked his true character by describing him as a "failed artist": his isolation in the discipline would prove that he is not a true "social scientist," and in reality, his most rationalistic claims would mask a more fundamental "aesthetic impulse," as his field notes would also seem to show, notes that, we are told, reveal more of an "artist trawling for ideas rather than an academic at work" [Patrick Wilcken, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Poet in the Laboratory*, New York: Penguin, 2010, 95]. One could, of course, consider these apparent contradictions as insurmountable, but one can also see this as an occasion to revisit our conventional distinction—which seems obvious, though in reality it is local and historical—between "science" and "poetry," as well as our preconceived image of what constitutes the normal behavior of an "academic at work." On these questions, see Debaene, "Claude Lévi-Strauss, 2008: What Anniversary?" in *My Favorite Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Dipankar Gupta (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2011), 61–75.

Strauss can thus be found in contemporary reflections on biopolitics, architecture, forms of art appraisal, and animal illness.

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While it is impossible to synthesize every return to structuralism, two aspects of Lévi-Strauss's œuvre reflect this move—aspects that were explicit from the beginning, but that have frequently been overlooked or neglected in the past. First, these recent works provide a deliberately anti-formalist reading of Lévi-Strauss, by opposing any reduction of structure to form; structuralism is conceived as a means of exploring content: "*form* is defined by opposition to material other than itself. But *structure* does not have any distinct content: it is content itself, apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real."[52] As Lévi-Strauss further observes in *The Savage Mind* "the principle underlying a classification can never be postulated in advance";[53] in other words, structural analysis does not attempt to extract the modes of organization of the given through an intellectual process of abstraction that would unveil a system of constraints "behind" empirical appearances; on the contrary, these modes of organization gradually emerge through local variation. Contrary to the image of the anthropologist who seeks to "isolate" formal systems before comparing them in the abstract, these studies employ—and follow, step by step—the gradual and centrifugal method of structural analysis whose point of departure is always empirical. A canonical example is the volumes of *Mythologiques*, which do not propose any *a priori* theory of myth but which unfold their analyses by using a specific Bororo myth as a starting point; the local variations of this myth are progressively apprehended, gradually encompassing the entirety of the American continent.

This priority given to content—that is, to ethnographic data, social organization, environmental constraints, kinship systems, mythical variants, and so on—very clearly distinguishes these new readings of Lévi-Strauss from the more traditional ways of approaching

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52. Lévi-Strauss, "Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp," *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 115.

53. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 58 (*La Pensée sauvage* [1962], in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, 620–621).

his œuvre: Lévi-Strauss is now reread *as a scholar/researcher* and no longer from the perspective of the philosophical propositions sprinkled throughout his texts. On the other hand, the inability to perceive this practical and applied dimension of structural anthropology explains the failure of the attempts to decipher structuralism historically, which claim to uncover the presuppositions or latent ideology of what is wrongly understood as a "school of thought."[54] The real difficulty of Lévi-Strauss's reflections resides less in understanding their principles than in assimilating an enormous mass of facts, unpronounceable words, tribes, languages, usages, plant and fish varieties, all of which are quite foreign to the Western reader.

The other aspect that these new readings highlight (and this is directly linked to the preceding point) is the notion of transformation. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Lévi-Strauss remarked:

> An arrangement is structured which meets but two conditions: that it be a system ruled by an internal cohesiveness; and that this cohesiveness, inaccessible to observation in an isolated system, be revealed in the study of transformations, through which similar properties are recognized in apparently different systems.[55]

It is this second part of the definition that many recent works have focused on. It has consequences on two levels. First, it allows a re-evaluation of structuralism in its entirety. This aspect is based on the fundamental idea that one "cannot prejudge the nature of a practice [of a usage, or of any cultural fact] by relying solely on relations of resemblance that [the observer is] inclined to find in them."[56] As Patrice Maniglier acutely argues, the first task of the anthropologist is not to explain the difference between cultural usages, but rather to *identify* what constitutes a usage—that is, to delimit what "is done" before asking the question "why does one do it?" (in response to which the anthropologist is invariably told "one does it because it is done").[57] As

we know, structural anthropology answers this question by analyzing possible variations and substitutions. The only way to determine the pertinent features of a myth, for example, is to describe the qualitative variations it presents in relation to other versions, and to grasp the rules that account for the correlation of these variations. The concept of "transformation" allows one to grasp this essential idea: a structure is a "'group of transformations' through which one can determine content by means of variants." "If the content is thus 'structured,' it is not because it is subject to (external) determination by an abstract form, but because it can only be defined in relation to other content."[58] In other words, these re-readings show that structuralism *is not* a new anthropological theory aimed at "explaining" cultural and social facts (to be paired alongside evolutionism, functionalism, and so on) but rather consists in a new way of *determining* them.

This insistence on the notion of transformation thereby affects the very conception of anthropological knowledge. Against the image of a static structuralism that rigidly compares fixed systems (an image supported by some passages in Lévi-Strauss),[59] the recent re-readings give serious weight to the idea that anthropological reflection can be situated in a relation of immanence to its object. This object is not situated in some abstract frame of reference created by Western rationality. This is what one should understand when Lévi-Strauss states (in *The Raw and the Cooked*) that "a reader would not be wrong if he took the book itself as a myth: the myth of mythology":[60] i.e., anthropology has no privileged principle for the forms of thought it studies. Its task is not to translate (and thus betray) the Other's thought in Western terms, but to create interconnections between conceptual fields. To the schoolteacher who suggested that a native Piro (Peruvian Amazon) woman boil water in order to avoid infantile diarrhea, the latter retorted: "our bodies are different from yours." Faced with

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54. See for example Adam Shatz's perplexity mixed with annoyance in "Jottings, Scraps and Doodles," *London Review of Books* 33/21 (November 3, 2011): 3–7.

55. Lévi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, 18.

56. Maniglier, "Des us et des signes," 105.

57. Ibid., 95–105. See the following remark by Lévi-Strauss: "Lowie's work seems to consist entirely in an exacting endeavor to meet the question (which was acknowledged as a prerequisite for any study in social structure): *What are the facts?*" (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 307–308). The English translation of this passage is

more of a paraphrase. A more literal rendition of what appears in parentheses would read: "Even for the structuralist, the first question one must answer is *What are the facts?* This question controls all others" (Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structural* [Paris: Plon, 1958], 340).

58. Maniglier, "Des us et des signes," 101–102.

59. In particular, the analogy between the typology of customs and the periodic table of elements—which horrified Clifford Geertz and which can be found in *Tristes tropiques*—is a nice analogy, but it is also an unfortunate one due to the confusion it introduces between structure and system or between structure and repertory.

60. Lévi-Strauss, "Overture to *le Cru et le cuit*," trans. Joseph H. McMahon, *Yale French Studies* 36–37 "Structuralism" (1966): 56.

such a response, the work of the anthropologist is not to try to "understand"—with a vaguely condescending benevolence—a "worldview" different from our own, which should be respected despite its obvious insufficiencies. Rather, it is about understanding that the Piro natives do not have a different "view" of the same "world" but different concepts of corporeality and humanity that are spread across different axes and networks of opposition: "The problem is not that the Amazonians and Euro-Americans give different names to (or have different representations of) the same things; the problem is that we and they are not talking about the same things. What we call 'body' is not what they call 'body.'"[61] One must therefore invent a domain and concepts—such as multi-naturalism—which can allow for connections and conversions between different systems of thought, thereby bringing the Western division between body and spirit in line with the way in which the Piro natives determine identity and alterity.

The priority given to the immanent logic of transformation thus invalidates the type of critique that is characteristic of "poststructural" re-readings, which condemned structural anthropology for claiming excessive authority and for the position of "mastery" it appeared to adopt in relation to its object. Oddly, through these re-readings of Lévi-Strauss, one can thus witness a rapprochement between the most abstract reflections on notions of transformation and the most detailed works on Amazonian ethnography. Indeed, many of them study native American cosmology, whose framework of relations extends to the entire universe. As just one example among hundreds, the Makuna natives of the high-Amazon believe that animal communities are rigorously organized in a way that is akin to human communities (they possess their own culture, customs, commodities, and so on), such that their relationship to the animals they hunt is conceived precisely as a relation of exchange and reciprocity with married kin.[62] One could see here (one more) sign that the distinction between consanguinity and kinship, which is essential to the structural anthropology of kinship, is a Western conception artificially projected onto a world that is fundamentally "other." Yet, rather than lamenting the discipline's confinement within its own

categories, several recent anthropological works have proposed rather to follow the natives' conception of how living beings should be organized and have proposed to extend the notion of kinship to the non-human world:

> first considered as an internal mechanism for the constitution of local groups, kinship then [appeared] as a relational system organizing extra-local relationships, connecting persons or groups beyond the kinship relation, and finally, as a language and a relational schema between the Same and the Other, identity and difference.[63]

These ethnographic works reveal quite consciously an intuition that Lévi-Strauss expressed in his works of the 1940s on the Nambikwara, where, for the first time, he affirmed that a system of reciprocity does not necessarily demand an extrinsic determination of classes to define desirable or prohibited partners, but simply the formal determination of a series of relations independently of the nature of the elements that these series bring together.

And yet, without even considering the results, such a raising of "kinship" to the level of a "politico-ritual phenomenon, exterior and superior to the encompassed aspect of kinship"[64] modifies the status of structural anthropology; for it is no longer seen as a set of conceptual tools that are heterogeneous to its object, but as the translation of the shock inflicted on the categories of Western thought by Amerindian socio-cosmologies. By desubstantivizing the difference between nature and culture (which, starting with *The Savage Mind*, appears as only one expression among other possible contrasts between opposed qualities), structural anthropology can rediscover one of the organizing principles of Amazonian thought and thus be seen as a mediation that allows one to go from an animistic ontological framework (in which natural beings are endowed with "human" and "social" dispositions) to a naturalistic ontological framework (which divides beings between a singular nature and varied cultures).[65] The recent debates surrounding the notions of animism and perspectivism thus shed new light on structural anthropology: by highlighting "the Amazonian underpinnings of structuralism," these debates invert the perspective, showing not that Lévi-Strauss understood

61. Viveiros de Castro, "The Gift and the Given: Three Nano-Essays on Kinship and Magic," 241.

62. Kaj Arhem, "The Cosmic Food Web: Human-Nature Relatedness in the Northwest Amazon," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Descola and Gilsi Palsson (London: Routledge, 1996), 185–204.

63. Fausto and Coelho de Souza, "Reconquistando o campo perdido," 98–99.

64. Fausto and Viveiros de Castro, "La puissance et l'acte: la parenté dans les basses terres de l'Amérique du Sud," *L'homme* 126–128 (1993): 150.

65. See Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*.

the natives, but, on the contrary, what his thought *owes to them.*[66] "Through a striking reversal"—according to one of Lévi-Strauss's own formulas glossed by Viveiros de Castro[67]—structuralism is no longer conceived of as an instrument for analyzing social organizations or systems of thought, but as the reverberation of Amazonian ontologies in Western thought. It would have thrilled Lévi-Strauss to see structural anthropology considered as a "simple transformation" of forms of thought it had taken as its object of study.

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These re-readings of Lévi-Strauss have indeed revived the anthropological project against the two rejections of which structural anthropology was the collateral victim. The first depicted anthropology as a knowledge that does violence to otherness. By returning to the essential notion of transformation and by internalizing it in some way within disciplinary practice, these returns to structuralism situate the work of anthropology not as being aloof and above but "in a strict structural continuity with the intellectual practices of the collectives that find themselves historically in the 'position of object' of the discipline."[68]

The second objection relates to the question of generalization. This is an essential point in the misunderstanding of the reception of structural anthropology in the Anglophone world and particularly in the United States. Very early on, within the anthropological discipline itself, Lévi-Strauss was criticized for having "constructed" his theory "out of" obsolete, insufficient—even erroneous—data. Why, then, would Lévi-Strauss have *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* republished (in 1967) with no alterations, when ethnographic knowledge had evolved, revealing some errors and confusions? Why try to maintain this edifice at all costs when the very "foundations" are receding? In addition, one could cite the radical postmodern critique, which sees the very notion of fact, proof, or empirical verification as modernistic constructions inherited from the universal rationalism of the Enlightenment. The only solution is to reconceptualize

66. Respectively: Taylor, "Don Quichotte en Amérique. Claude Lévi-Strauss et l'anthropologie américaniste," 97; Fausto and Coelho de Souza, "Reconquistando o campo perdido," 87.
67. Viveiros de Castro, *Métaphysiques cannibales* (Paris: PUF, 2009), 6–12.
68. Ibid., 6.

the very idea of generalization. One must abandon the idea that anthropological generality "rises" through a progressive distancing from ethnographic reality (thus betraying it). As Patrice Maniglier and Gildas Salmon have recently demonstrated, the radical newness of structural anthropology resides not in its having proposed a new interpretation of ethnographic facts, but in its having rethought, in a single gesture, the determination of these facts and the relation between ethnography and anthropology: the object of anthropological knowledge is organized, through local variations, into a cultural continuum; consequently, ethnography does not precede anthropological comparison; rather, it is conditioned by the comparative anthropological project. This is a difficult idea to accept, since it goes against the commonsense anthropological view, which says that one ought first to know the facts before comparing them; but, in another sense, this is the only way to respond to the objection that "facts are facts," for the researcher is always suspected of warping reality to make it conform to his/her own categories. One must thus admit that (like the principle of a classification) the delimitation of an ethnographic fact can never be postulated *a priori*; it emerges only through its differentiation from what surrounds it, and for this reason, Lévi-Strauss used to say that differential gaps are the proper object of anthropological inquiry. This is undoubtedly the reason why the reception of structuralism has encountered such difficulties in the American culturalist tradition, for which anthropology is only legitimate (if at all . . .) as a comparison between cultures that have themselves been determined inductively. By founding anthropological comparison not on inventories of resemblances, but on the systematicity of differences between "cultures" (which are never given, but are provisionally inferred through analysis), structural anthropology has modified "the very manner of constructing comparables."[69]

In 1963, Susan Sontag introduced Lévi-Strauss to the American public (that is, beyond departments of anthropology, where he was already well known) through a somewhat unfortunate phrase: "the anthropologist as hero." Fifty years later, a very different portrait has emerged from these re-readings of structural anthropology. On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss appears in retrospect as the one who rescued anthropology from its simple status as a discipline, an essentially colonial discipline, for that matter, less because of its relation to its

69. Salmon, *Les structures de l'esprit*, 4. See also, Maniglier, "Des us et des signes."

"objects" than because it was once believed that anthropology could develop within a restricted domain, without affecting other areas of Western thought. If one can still speak of heroism, it has nothing to do with a "hard-won impassivity"[70] but rather with the fact that, in the wake of Lévi-Strauss, the shock of ethnography unsettles Western thought *in toto*—which explains his recently acquired status as "classical."[71] On the other hand, these re-readings, which give a great deal of attention to the properly scholarly work of Lévi-Strauss, and which are centered on the notion of transformation rather than structure, make Lévi-Strauss the precursor of a new anthropology—an anthropology that is neither modern or postmodern, colonial or postcolonial, but one that can be qualified as "a-modern" and "de-colonial," and which replaces the Great Divide between Us and the Others with the multiplicity of variations.

—Translated by Caroline Vial

70. Susan Sontag, "The anthropologist as hero" [1963], in Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 72.
71. See Debaene, "Préface," in Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, xiv–xxii.

ROBERT DORAN

Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the Debate with Lévi-Strauss

It is precisely because all these aspects of the savage mind can be found in Sartre's philosophy, that the latter is in my view unqualified to pass judgment on it: he is prevented from doing so by the very fact of furnishing its equivalent. To the anthropologist, on the contrary, this philosophy (like all others) affords a first-class ethnographic document, the study of which is essential to an understanding of the mythology of our own time.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss[1]

It is almost an article of faith that the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss are antipodes and that the displacement of the former by the latter represented the triumph of unconscious structures over a philosophy of consciousness and freedom. And yet, in works published at the beginning of the 1960s, there was an attempt on the part of both thinkers to synthesize aspects of their respective systems. In 1960, Sartre published his massive *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*Critique de la raison dialectique*), which extends his existential phenomenology into the domains of social ontology and the philosophy of history. But Sartre also situates his work with respect to the contemporary debate over structuralism: "it could be said that the aim of the critical investigation is to establish a structural and historical anthropology."[2] This claim, coupled with Sartre's substantial discussion of Lévi-Strauss's

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), n. 249.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume One*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004), 69.