

**LEVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE***Anthropologist*

Claude Lévi-Strauss's theories have been fundamental to the renewal of modern anthropology, in particular the study of kinship systems, totemism, classification, and mythology. Throughout his works, he has sought to understand the functioning of so-called "primitive" modes of thought. In opposition to the theories formulated by influential predecessors such as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, he has revealed that these "primitive" modes of thought are neither radically different (prelogical, prerational) nor fundamentally more archaic than our own "civilized" ways of thinking. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss is careful to present these "primitive" modes of thought not so much as the attribute of so-called primitive societies, but as an aspect of the way in which all human beings think.

Lévi-Strauss's influence, however, extends beyond anthropology into philosophy, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and other areas. The dissemination of his ideas, in particular about the representation of historical time and the relationship between primitive ("cold") and Western ("hot") societies, gave rise to a number of debates with French philosophers, among them Jean-Paul Sartre (the last chapter of Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée sauvage* [1962], entitled "Histoire et Dialectique," contains a virulent attack on Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*), Paul Ricoeur (see "Structure et herméneutique" in the special "pensée sauvage" issue of the journal *Esprit* published in November 1963), and Jacques Derrida (see, in particular, "La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" and "La Violence de la lettre: de Lévi-Strauss à Rousseau"). This dialogue (sometimes conflict) between anthropology and philosophy has played a major part in shaping contemporary French thought.

In the area of literary criticism, it was arguably Lévi-Strauss's influence on Roland Barthes, who in his early works used structuralist ideas to interpret literature, film, and fashion, that did the most for the constitution of a structuralist poetics. When, in 1964, Jacques Lacan gave his first seminar on "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis" at the École normale supérieure, one of the first questions that he raised was whether Lévi-Strauss's notion of a *pensée sauvage* could accommodate the unconscious as such (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 13). Lévi-Strauss himself borrowed and used concepts from many other disciplines (linguistics, mathematics, musicology, biology, and philosophy) and, in this respect, played a key role in demonstrating the value of the kind of interdisciplinary connections

that are one of the distinctive features of contemporary French thought.

There is a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of Lévi-Strauss's works that resides in the way in which they combine scientific enquiry and metaphor, reasoning and poetic invention. In early essays, such as "L'Analyse structurale en linguistique et en anthropologie" or "Langage et société" (*Anthropologie structurale*, 1958), he expresses the ambition to elevate anthropology to a new level of scientificity by importing into anthropology the methodology of structural linguistics. It was this lateral connection between anthropology and structural linguistics that provided Lévi-Strauss with the name for his method of anthropological enquiry: "structural anthropology." He forecast that the branch of modern linguistics founded by Ferdinand de Saussure and developed by his successors Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetskoj (probably the three linguists who most influenced Lévi-Strauss) would revolutionize the social sciences in the same way that nuclear physics revolutionized the exact sciences. Part of what motivated Lévi-Strauss to turn to structural linguistics, and more specifically phonology, as a model for anthropology was that linguistics was the first social science to have succeeded in uncovering "necessary relations," normally the prerogative of the exact sciences (*Anthropologie structurale*, 40). And he thought that it might be possible for anthropology to follow in its wake.

However, it would be wrong to view Lévi-Strauss's works in the light of this project alone, however important it may have been in his early works. In practice, it is doubtful whether one can accurately describe Lévi-Strauss's works as an application of the methods of structural linguistics to anthropology (even if this is often how he presents structural anthropology himself). The linguistic model often works more as the means of developing intricate metaphors or analogies—such as the one that he draws between "kinship systems" and "phonological systems" (the former guarantees the "circulation" of women, the latter the "circulation" of words)—that enable him to approach familiar material in an innovative way. Later, in the *Mythologiques* (1964–1971), his four-volume study of Amerindian mythology, Lévi-Strauss was to identify Wagner (not Saussure, Jakobson, or Troubetzkoi) as the founding father of the structural analysis of myths. What is his reasoning here?

One of the aims of Lévi-Strauss's structural method (this holds true of the whole of his work on myths, for example) is to show that seemingly different or dissimilar objects of study (let us say, two unrelated myths from two distinct populations) in fact share the same hidden armature or structure. Wagner often used musical motifs—in *The Ring*, the motif of the renun-

ciation of love, for example—to establish connections between seemingly unrelated episodes in the stories that his operas tell. As Lévi-Strauss explained in an interview given on Canadian radio in 1977 (later published in *Myth and Meaning*, 1978), the musical motif of the renunciation of love first occurs in the *Rhinegold*, when Alberich learns that to conquer the gold he must renounce human love (which he does). However, subsequent uses of this motif do not coincide in any obvious way with events in the narrative that reflect this theme. It recurs in the *Valkyrie*, when, thanks to a sword buried in a tree, Siegmund initiates an incestuous relationship with his sister Sieglinde (here the hero has fallen in love, not renounced love), and it recurs in the *Valkyrie* when Wotan condemns his daughter Brunhilde to a long sleep surrounded by a ring of fire. Lévi-Strauss argues that these episodes share a common structural armature. In each case, “there is a treasure which has to be pulled away . . . from what it is bound to. There is the gold . . . stuck in the depths of the Rhine; there is the sword, which is stuck in a tree . . . there is the woman Brunhilde, who will have to be pulled out of fire” (*Myth and Meaning*, 48). From a structural point of view, Lévi-Strauss continues, “the gold, the sword and Brunhilde are one and the same.” Said differently, they are structural variations of one another, and the uncovering of this hidden relationship between these three Wagnerian mythemes (in Lévi-Strauss’s terminology, the mythical equivalents of phonemes, the elementary units of signification of myths) provides Lévi-Strauss with a more general key to the significance of Wagner’s opera. Wagner uses the musical score in *The Ring* as the means of a structural analysis of the narrative sequences that form the libretto, and this is why Lévi-Strauss refers to Wagner as the father of the structural analysis of myths. In this context, it would appear that structuralism is better described as an application of the methods of operatic composition than of linguistic theory. Lévi-Strauss’s many references to music and musicology in his analyses of the structure of myths underline the ambiguities and complexities involved in the structuralist approach to the interpretative act, which here appears more as an Orphic quest for concealed musical forms than the scientific application of an interpretative grid.

Furthermore, in the *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss does not content himself with the role of critic or exegete. The *Mythologiques* is a complex, overdetermined work that, beyond its significance as a treatise on Amerindian mythology, constitutes Lévi-Strauss’s attempt to create with mythical images the verbal analogue of a symphony. In this respect, it may be read as a mytho-poetic creation in its own right. Lévi-Strauss has commented on a number of occasions that

he would have liked to have been a conductor (something for which, he says, he lacks the right genetic make up), and the *Mythologiques* are, in a sense, his way of fulfilling this childhood dream by other means.

Although his works are steeped in philosophy, Lévi-Strauss’s decision to become an anthropologist was tied up, in part at least, with his rejection of philosophy. He studied philosophy (and law) at the Sorbonne in the 1920s and passed the *agrégation* in 1931, but he abhorred the dialectical exercises that were the staple diet of the philosophy student of the day as well as the solipsistic fascination with the self that he saw as one of the traits of French philosophy. He characterized himself as having a “Neolithic intelligence” (which one may interpret, in part at least, as meaning that he has a propensity to think in metaphors). When he was offered a post as a lecturer in sociology at the University of São Paulo in 1934, he seized on the opportunity to expand his horizons.

In the 1930s, he carried out ethnographic field work in the Matto Grosso region of Brazil, in particular among the Bororo, the Caduveo, and the Nambikwara Indians. He was to give an account of these formative years of his life, as well as of his later escape from Nazi-occupied France to New York, some twenty years after the event in *Tristes tropiques* (1955). This book, his most personal, is at once an ethnographic treatise, a travelogue of sorts (or antitravelogue, as it starts with the sentence “I hate traveling and explorers”), a confession, and a series of meditations on the nature of anthropology, man’s relationship to his environment to history and to time. *Tristes tropiques* is also a profoundly ecological book. It is imbued with a pessimism that is born from the realization that the Amerindian populations that he studied were but the remains of far greater societies that have been all but decimated as a result of the European invasion of the New World. He could easily have echoed Paul Valéry’s comment, made in the aftermath of World War I, that “we now know that human civilizations are mortal.” Western history, for Lévi-Strauss, is made up of a series of wrong turns. He is deeply skeptical of the excessive value that the modern world places on progress and of the event-driven conception of history that underpins the West’s conception of time. He sees the inherent conservatism of “primitive” societies as an example of great wisdom. Their relationship to time is determined by their constant effort to minimize the effects of historical change so as to maintain their social institutions in a state of equilibrium. The order that exists in the present is conceived as a projection of an order that has existed since mythical times. One of the great modern ills is what Lévi-Strauss describes as an excess in the levels of communication that exist between populations. As a result, the world we inhabit

is slowly establishing a global monoculture that, in the long run, will eradicate the very cultural differences that are the anthropologist's object of study. Travel itself, in any true sense of the term, will no longer be possible.

Lévi-Strauss's first major work, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (presented as a doctoral thesis in 1948 and first published in 1949), challenged the received wisdom that the nuclear family is the basic building-block of kinship systems. True to one of the fundamental insights of structuralism—namely, that the relationships between things matter more than the thing in itself—Lévi-Strauss argued that the elementary structures of kinship are to be found in the system of marital ties that link horizontally, as it were, one family to the next. For Lévi-Strauss, it is alliance, the system of relationships between families, that is the key to the constitution of kinship systems, not the nuclear family.

Marcel Mauss's influential essay *The Gift* (1925) played a key role in shaping Lévi-Strauss's ideas about kinship. Mauss developed a general theory about the role of gift exchange in human societies on the basis of his study of the Kula ring, a system of ceremonial gift exchanges developed by the Trobriand Islanders (the inhabitants of an archipelago lying off the Southeastern end of New Guinea). Lévi-Strauss proposed that marital alliances between groups took the classic form of a gift exchange relationship and that the gifts in this case were women. Drawing in particular on data from Australia, China, and India, he explained the many different forms of marital alliance as so many solutions to the problem of bringing about and regulating the exchange of women.

He argued that the rule that first set this system of exchange in motion, thereby instituting human society as we know it, was the incest taboo. The incest taboo forces individuals to form marital alliances outside of the immediate family group and hence to create broader social structures, an "international community." By bringing about exogamy ("marrying out"), the incest taboo sets in motion the multiple networks of "communication" that are the basis of human society (the communication of words, of goods and services, and of women). As such, the incest taboo may be viewed as the first social rule and the means by which early humans, living in a state of nature, first created culture (in a later work, Lévi-Strauss was to emphasize that he viewed the nature/culture dichotomy more as a useful methodological tool for analyzing systems of representation than as an historically accurate concept).

Lévi-Strauss finally reduces the many different forms of marital alliances observed by anthropologists to three basic kinship structures that are constructed

out of two types of exchange, which he terms "generalized" and "restricted."

Lévi-Strauss's reduction of all known forms of alliance to a much simpler system of underlying recurring patterns is characteristic of his structural method. It is a method that aims to go beyond the confusion and diversity of observed phenomena to uncover invariables, the structures that form the "deep grammar" of human society, and if one were to ask where these structures come from, Lévi-Strauss would doubtless answer, "the human mind (*l'esprit*)," by which he would mean the unconscious (although not in a Freudian sense). We are no more aware of the structures that determine social life than we are of the rules of grammar when we speak. These structures belong to the realm of an unconscious system, which Lévi-Strauss construes on the model of Saussure's concept of *langue* and that acts as a mediating term between self and other, individual and group. The existence of this unconscious system, akin to a matrix, is the very condition of social life, in the same way that the existence of what Saussure called *langue* (the deep grammar underlying linguistic competence) is the condition of meaningful speech.

In identifying and describing the elementary structures of kinship, whose logical template he formalized with the help of the mathematician André Weil, Lévi-Strauss is therefore also describing the functioning of the unconscious mind that generates them. The structural map of society is also, for Lévi-Strauss, a map of the functioning of the brain, which is one of the reasons why Lévi-Strauss said in *La Pensée sauvage* that "anthropology is a form of psychology." In the final stages of the interpretative process, structural analysis becomes a means of contemplating the functioning of the unconscious mind, whose mirror image is reflected in the "deep grammar" of human society. In the Lévi-Straussian scheme of things, this "mirroring effect," whereby the unconscious operations of the mind are unveiled, is a source of profound aesthetic emotion.

His later work, *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), is the description and analysis of an elemental mode of thought that subtends many different forms of cultural creation, from taxonomy to myth making. Put differently, it is a description of the structural unconscious. This mode of thought is what Lévi-Strauss terms *pensée sauvage*. The expression is based on a pun: a "pensée" in French is both a thought and a kind of wild flower. *La pensée sauvage* is therefore a wild (in the botanical sense of the term) mode of thought and is to be understood in opposition to domesticated thinking, the specialized thinking developed by large-scale ("hot") societies for the purposes of productivity. What Lévi-Strauss set out to show in *La Pensée sauvage* is

that “wild thought” is, in many respects, the equal of domesticated thought and is certainly no less coherent or logical.

Levi-Strauss’s critique of early anthropological theories about totemism illustrates this point well (see *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, 1962). Totemism is the custom of associating an individual or social group (usually a clan) with an animal species whose name it bears and with which it entertains a special relationship. In the past, totemism was thought to be based on the mystical identification of the members of a clan with their totemic animal. Totemism was construed as a remainder from a more archaic stage in human evolution (associated with animism) that existed before the emergence of rational thought. As such, it was the means of relegating “primitive” man not only to the ancient past but also to a realm closer to the state of nature than our own “civilized” societies.

Levi-Strauss’s theory of totemism illustrates his very different view of the nature of *la pensée sauvage* and, hence, of primitive thought. For Levi-Strauss, totemism is essentially a classificatory tool, the means by which one social group encodes and signifies the resemblances and differences that form the basis of its relationship to another social group. Thus, the association of clan A with the totem Eaglehawk and clan B with the totem Crow should be read as the proposition that the relationship between clan A and clan B is analogous to that between the Eaglehawk and the Crow (clan A : clan B :: Eaglehawk : Crow). The system of resemblances and differences between Eaglehawk and Crow (both are carnivorous birds, but the first is a bird of prey, the second a carrion-eater) may be used, for example, to encode the relationships of friendship and competition, solidarity and opposition that bind these two clans. The institution of totemism is essentially a complex metaphor that a social group uses to express its view of itself.

The particularity of so-called “wild” modes of thought is that they function at a level of experience where “logical properties, as attributes of things, will be manifested as directly as flavors or perfumes” (*The Raw and the Cooked*, 14). It is a “logic of sensible properties,” a “logic of the concrete.” As such, it forms the basis of a primitive science or “science of the concrete.”

How does such a primitive science based on “concrete logic” work? It constructs hypotheses and makes deductions about the properties of things on the basis of the observation of what seventeenth-century philosophers called their secondary qualities; in fact, those qualities of an object are perceived first, such as colors, odors, tastes, and textures. Although primitive science may not understand how the secondary qualities of any given object are related to its essential properties (as

does modern science), the gamble that there is a relationship between the two (e.g., that bitterness signifies toxicity) in practice pays off and enables the constitution of a form of speculative science. In this respect, what differentiates “primitive” or “concrete” science from modern science, according to Levi-Strauss, is not so much the types of mental operations that each presupposes (for Levi-Strauss, “man has always thought equally well”), but the fact that the former seeks to understand the natural world purely on the basis of the experience of sense perception, whereas the latter resorts to a plane of abstract formalization. The results of modern science are, of course, very different from those of primitive science. Nevertheless, Lévi-Strauss argues, they are both rooted in the same kinds of mental operations. What differ are the types of objects to which these operations are applied.

*La pensée sauvage* (concrete logic) is not only the basis of practical activities such as classification or primitive science but also the source of aesthetic and mythical creation. Nor are “wild” modes of thought the sole prerogative of “primitive” societies. In Western societies, “wild” modes of thought, Levi-Strauss says, continue to exist in, among other places, the “natural reserve” of art (in this respect, their status is that of an endangered species). What drives *la pensée sauvage* is a will-to-order that in many ways is common to art and science. The metaphor that Lévi-Strauss uses to describe the functioning of this mode of thought is that of *bricolage*, which one may loosely translate as “intellectual Do-It-Yourself.” Given any set of heterogeneous elements, the role of the *bricoleur* is to find a way of fitting them together. The purpose of the bricoleur, whether myth-maker, artist, primitive scientist, or anthropologist, is to assemble the fragments of a puzzle into a coherent whole. As such, his or her victory is that of imposing order on disorder, meaning on incoherence. As an anthropological concept, *bricolage* refers to the process whereby we construct the many cultural schemas by which we give meaning and order to the world in which we live.

Another major aspect of Levi-Strauss’s works is his theory of primitive mythology. He defines a myth as a logical tool for mediating a fundamental contradiction or paradox inherent to a given society. In “La Structure des mythes” (*Anthropologie structurale*), picking up on seemingly marginal features of the Oedipus story, such as references to “difficulties in walking straight and standing upright” contained in the names of a number of the characters (the name Oedipus itself may mean “swollen foot”), Levi-Strauss argued that this myth was concerned with the contradiction, inherent in Greek culture, between the belief that humans are born from the earth (autochthonous birth) and the knowledge that they are born from the union of a man

and a woman. Lévi-Strauss interprets the Oedipus myth as a logical tool whose function is to relate the question, “Are humans born from one or from two?” to the derivative question, “Are they born from that which is different from them or that which is the same?” (*Structural Anthropology*, 216).

More generally, Lévi-Strauss saw primitive myths as being made up of a series of “superimposed” extended metaphors or analogies. Each myth encodes a set of problems or themes in terms of a series of interlocking analogies, the main purpose of the myth being to enable the conversion or translation of one analogy into the next. For example, there are a series of myths, discussed in *L’Origine des manières de table* (1968), that are about the origins of the alternation of day and night. They tell the story of how, in mythical times, divine or human actions put an end to the eternal day or eternal night that once existed on earth and brought about the regular alternation of day and night. Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of these myths is that they are about the institution of social order. More specifically, they are concerned with the problem of whom to marry. The myths warn against too equally dangerous extremes, that of an excessively close marriage (i.e., incestuous) or an excessively distant marriage (with a foreigner or enemy). The myths associate these undesirable forms of marital alliance with the equally undesirable astronomical extremes of “eternal night” or “eternal day,” which occur when the moon and the sun are either too far apart or too close together. By contrast, the institution of the regular alternation of day and night signifies the ideal of a social order in which man and woman live at exactly the right distance from one another, one that is neither too close nor too far. What is unique about Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of this myth is not so much the unveiling of a coded message contained in the myth (a critical approach to myth that has existed at least since the “allegorical” interpretations practiced by the Ancient Greeks) but the fact that each code and its message always lead to other codes and other messages in such a way that we never reach a “final” or “original” meaning. The meaning of the myth disappears in a vanishing perspective of interlocking analogies. For example, the motif of the regular alternation of day and night may be related to another motif that exists in another series of myths that tell the story of how a river is magically made to flow in two directions. In other words, it is transformed into a river that could be traveled in both directions (upstream and downstream) in the same amount of time (in reality, the trip upstream would be much longer). The motif of the two-way river expresses in spatial terms what the motif of the alternation of day and night expresses in temporal terms. These motifs are combinatorial variations of one another and indeed of numer-

ous other motifs. The point of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of myths is thus not so much to provide the key that enables the reader to decode the “hidden” meaning of the myth (although he does this too), but to trace the logic whereby one system of analogies (or mythical “codes”) may be converted into another.

What interests Lévi-Strauss more than the “hidden” meaning of myths is their structure and genesis. As has already been indicated, the basic hypothesis underlying the *Mythologiques* is that myths come into being by a process of transformation of one myth into another. Each myth is the result of a kaleidoscopic type of rearrangement of elements, of a series of logical substitutions and permutations by virtue of which one myth is transmuted into another (the *bricoleur* metaphor applies here too). For Lévi-Strauss, myths do not have any meaning in themselves but only in relation to each other and therefore have to be studied in the course of their transformation from one into another to unlock their meanings.

The South American Gé tell the story of Botoque, who is taken by his elder brother-in-law to catch the young of a pair of macaws nesting on top of a steep rock (see “M7” in *Le Cru et le cuit*). Here is a fragment of that myth. Botoque is made to climb a makeshift ladder, but having arrived at the height of the nest, all he can find in it are two eggs. His brother-in-law asks for them. Botoque throws them down, but as they fall the eggs transform into stones which cut his elder brother’s hands as he tries to catch them. Enraged, the latter removes the ladder and abandons Botoque. For several days, Botoque is stranded at the top of the rock. He is hungry and thirsty, and as he is becoming thinner he is forced to eat his own excrement. At last, he sees below him a spotted jaguar carrying a bow and arrow and all kinds of game. He wants to cry out for help, but fear of the jaguar renders him mute. The jaguar notices the shadow of Botoque on the ground. He tries, in vain, to catch it, then looks up, inquires after Botoque, replaces the ladder against the rock and invites the young boy down.

If one is to compare M7 to the other versions of this myth, one notices that a series of transformations have occurred. In M12, Botoque climbs the ladder to the nest of macaws but then lies to his brother-in-law, telling him that the nest is empty. The brother-in-law becomes impatient, so Botoque throws a stone at him (taken from his mouth, not the nest). And this stone transforms into an egg as it falls to the ground. In M7 and M8, Botoque, trapped on his rock, is forced to eat his own excrement; in M9, M10, and M11, Botoque is covered in the excrement of birds hovering around the nest. In M8, the jaguar climbs the ladder to help Botoque down; in the other versions he welcomes him at the foot of the ladder; in M9, M10, M11, and M12

the jaguar is given the macaws in exchange for his help, in M7 and M8 he is not.

As orally transmitted narratives, primitive myths are constantly being altered or transformed. This is why, to understand a myth, Lévi-Strauss starts by viewing it in the context of its many variants. In *Le Cru et le cuit*, he shows that the above Gé myth, a myth about the origin of fire (it concludes when Botoque steals fire from the jaguar and gives it to man), is in fact a transformation of a myth (M1) told by a neighboring population, the Bororo. The Bororo myth (M1) tells the story of the origin of rainwater, and Lévi-Strauss's argument is that it is, in fact, an inversion of the above Gé myth: It is a myth about the origin of fire metamorphosed into its opposite, a myth about the origin of water.

Lévi-Strauss's working method is to submit each myth to an analysis that reveals its transformational connections to other myths. These are progressively brought into the picture and in turn analyzed. Lévi-Strauss follows step by step the paths indicated by the myths themselves, which corresponded to the paths of their coming into being. As each myth is connected to the next, series of affiliated myths are integrated into broader units, and gradually the picture of a total system—compared by Lévi-Strauss to a nebula—emerges. In the process, the reader is taken on a journey from the tip of South Brazil to the Northwest coast of America.

Whatever the subject of Lévi-Strauss's anthropological inquiries, these often contain either an explicit or a veiled confrontation with the question, What is the nature of the aesthetic object? His work on Amerindian myth leads him to formulate, in his later work (*La Voie des masques*, 1975; *Le Regard éloigné*, 1983; *Regarder écouter lire*, 1993) a general theory of creation-by-transformation that anticipates later theories of intertextuality. Lévi-Strauss's transformation theory of creation provides a model for understanding art not so much in terms of the referential or mimetic function of art but in terms of the systems of internal connections that, beyond a work's "content," link it to other works of art (something that postmodern art has elevated to the rank of an overt counter-aesthetic). Lévi-Strauss's study of the mutations of Amerindian myths enabled him to formulate a transformational grammar that he put forward as a key to the functioning of the "structural unconscious" (in this respect, the *Mythologiques* are a continuation of his earlier project of elucidating *la pensée sauvage*). In essays such as "De Chrétien de Troyes à Richard Wagner" (*Regard éloigné*), or in the chapter devoted to Nicholas Poussin in *Regarder écouter lire*, Lévi-Strauss sought to apply what he learnt from myths to other forms of creation, including Western art. His transformational model of

creation anchors the act of creation in combinatorial logic. He finds the key to the relationship between one work of art and the next in a quasi-mathematical series of logical operations (inversions, reversals, substitutions, rotations, etc.) that account for the conversion of one work into the next. In this way, he establishes, for example, a subterranean transformational connection between a painting by Guercino, *Et in Arcadia Ego* (painted around 1621–1623) and two paintings by Poussin on the same theme, the first probably painted between 1629 and 1630 the other between 1638 and 1639. The conclusion one is invited to draw from this analysis is that Poussin thinks and creates in a way that is not entirely dissimilar from an Amerindian myth-maker. The value of Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of Poussin lies not only in his uncovering of the hidden transformations that, so he argues, link the above paintings but also in the very act of connecting such seemingly distant and dissimilar aesthetic objects. In viewing one of France's greatest and most classical painters through the lens of primitive myth, he invites us to question the hierarchy of aesthetic values that opposes Western art (one might have said "cooked" art) to primitive or "raw" art. His uncovering, in the *Mythologiques*, of deep structures within myth that resemble well-known musical forms such as the rondo or the sonata fulfils a similar function. If we follow this line of thought, we must also believe that these forms arise out the innate structures of the brain as opposed to having been shaped by history.

BORIS WISEMAN

See also Roland Barthes; Jacques Derrida; Lucien Levy-Bruhl; Marcel Mauss; Paul Ricoeur; Jean-Paul Sartre; Ferdinand de Saussure; Paul Valéry

### Biography

Claude Lévi-Strauss was born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1908 and brought up in the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris, rue Poussin. He studied law and philosophy and passed the *agrégation* in philosophy in 1931 (he studied for this exam alongside Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir). He left for Brazil in 1935 to take up a post as a lecturer in sociology at the University of São Paulo. In the summer of 1935 and then later in 1938, Lévi-Strauss conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Mato Grosso region of Brazil among the Caduveo and Bororo Indians and further west, among the Nambikwara. During World War II, he fled Nazi-occupied France for New York, where he attended the lectures of the Prague School linguist Roman Jakobson. Having returned to France, in 1950 he was elected to the chair in "Religions comparées des peuples non civilisés" (literally "Comparative Re-

ligions of Non-Civilized Peoples”) at the École pratique des hautes études. He was later to have the title of the chair changed to “Religions comparées des peuples sans écriture” (“The Comparative Religions of Peoples without Writing”). In 1959, he was elected to the chair in social anthropology at the Collège de France and in 1973, he became a member of the Académie Française. In 1961, he founded (with Émile Benveniste and Pierre Gourou) the anthropological journal *L’Homme*.

### Selected Works

- Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* [The Elementary Structures of Kinship], 1949  
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### Further Reading

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## LÉVY-BRUHL, LUCIEN

### *Ethnographer and Sociologist*

Lévy-Bruhl wrote under the pseudonym of Deuzelle for *L’Humanité* before the newspaper became the property of the French Communist Party that was emerging from the split of the worker’s movement that followed the Congress of Tours (1925). At that time, the French philosophical field (keeping in mind that Hegel was not yet translated and Marx was absent) was being split between the supporters of the spiritualist tradition, exemplified by the religious exegesis of Loisy, the immanence of Maurice Blondel, the intuitionism of Bergson, the spiritual evolutionism of Teilhard de Chardin, and the supporters of the positivism of Auguste Comte. The latter were fervent republicans striving to build, with an optimism characteristic of their time, a secular, socialist, and progressive morality, which would replace religious precepts and, therefore, be considered a science on the same basis as the others.

It is within this context that one has to understand why Lévy-Bruhl first turned to the translation of the Latin moralist Cicero (1881), then the commentary of Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle (1882), and also wrote an essay titled “Darwin’s Morality” (1883). The defense of his theses in 1884 still echoed this hope: *L’Idée de responsabilité* (The Notion of Responsibility, French thesis) and *Quid de deo Seneca senserit* (Latin thesis). In 1901, Lévy-Bruhl published *La Morale et la science des mœurs* (Morality and the Science of Morals), which Durkheim summarized in laudatory terms in *L’Année Sociologique*.

After having examined the rationalist mystique of the Spinozist Jacobi (*La philosophie de Jacobi*, 1894) and the legacy of Auguste Comte (*History of Modern Philosophy in France*, 1899), whose correspondence with John Stuart Mill he edited (1899) and whose works he synthesized (*La Philosophie d’Auguste Comte*, 1900), Lévy-Bruhl became enthusiastic about psychology, which had reached France with the works of Bernard Perez, Pierre Janet, and Georges Dumas.

He soon became interested in another nascent science, ethnography. *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Mental Functions in Inferior Societies, 1910) was the first book that, based on the ethnographic data of the time (dealing mainly with Australian societies), revealed the specificity of what Lévy-Bruhl called “primitive mentality.” The book used Durkheim’s integrating notion that the type of