STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY ZERO

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

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Edited and with an Introduction by Vincent Debaene

Translated by Ninon Vinsonneau and Jonathan Magidoff

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A Note on this Edition

This collection is organized into five non-chronological parts. Indeed, the only chronology we might have relied on is that of the official publication dates of the articles it comprises. And in those troubled years, and over such a brief period of time, this could not be expected to have revealed much, either about their actual date of publication or that of their composition or conception. A thematic organization suggested itself for two additional reasons: first, to remain faithful to the "structural anthropologies" model, as Lévi-Strauss himself had conceived it for his own volumes; and, second, to avoid the assembled articles being received as mere "heritage." For the point was not to collect the juvenilia of a great author or to shed light on the genesis of his oeuvre but, rather, to make more easily available forgotten and little-known texts that have lost none of their relevance today – and which the current state of the world may well have made newly pertinent.

The references for the original publications are provided at the end of the volume. Twelve of the seventeen articles were originally published in English, and it is unclear whether Lévi-Strauss wrote them directly in English – perhaps with some assistance – or if he translated them himself from an original French text. These original English texts have been edited for clarity and consistency for the present volume. Their initial publication was, in some cases, followed by the publication of an original French version (chapters I and XII) or else of a French translation of the original English version by Lévi-Strauss himself (chapter VIII). The original French versions of chapters II and XI have been lost, and so the texts included here are slightly edited English translations by Patricia Blanc from 1942. Concerning the names of tribes, we standardized usage and spelling when there were variations from one text to the next.

We have endeavored to include the illustrations that accompanied these articles in their original publication, although this has in some cases proven technically impossible. The quality of the plates of photographs that illustrated chapters XV, XVI and XVII was too poor for them to be reproduced, and we have included only those photographs for which we were able to find quality reproductions. The illustrations for chapter XII combine original images (those we managed to locate) and recent photographs of the objects that appeared in the 1943 version.

This volume would not have been possible without the friendly support and encouragement of Monique Lévi-Strauss, who spurred me to resume work on this project, and the precious exchanges and discussions with Laurent Jeanpierre and Frédéric Keck, whose original idea it was. My warmest thanks to all three. This work also owes a lot to various people who generously reread the preface and translations or who lent assistance on certain specific points: Marie Desmartis, Eléonore Devevey, Fredéric Keck, Emmanuelle Loyer, Gildas Salmon, Thomas Hirsch and Samuel Skippon. Finally, Maurice Olender kept a benevolent watch over the entire process and offered invaluable suggestions, as a reader always keen to maintain the "right distance."

Illustrations

The photographs in this volume are by Claude Lévi-Strauss.
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Introduction by Vincent Debaene

"Your thought is not yet mature." According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, this is how Brice Parain, then assistant and editorial advisor to the illustrious publisher Gaston Gallimard, explained his decision not to publish the collection of articles entitled *Structural Anthropology*. In his account Lévi-Strauss does not date the incident but indicates that it took place "before writing *Tristes Tropiques*" – i.e. likely sometime in 1953 or 1954.[1] Beyond his stated motive, Parain – whom Lévi-Strauss would soon describe as among the "opponents of anthropology"[2] – probably did not think very highly of volumes of collected articles in general, often seen as too heterogeneous and repetitive to make for a good read. However, the manuscript of *Structural Anthropology* that Lévi-Strauss submitted to the Plon publishing house – which was ultimately published in 1958, three years after *Tristes Tropiques* – was not simply a compilation of previously published work preceded by a perfunctory preface. Quite the contrary, the collection had a robust structure, dispensing with a lazy chronology in favor of a thematic organization in five parts and seventeen chapters. The volume proceeds from the most fundamental level at which social facts are structured ("Language and Kinship") to "Social Organization" and then to the concrete expressions of these underlying structures, which can be traced in rites and myths ("Magic and Religion"), before turning to creative expression ("Art") and finally to the question of the place of anthropology in both the field of social science and modern education ("Problems of Method and Teaching"). The whole is preceded by an ambitious introduction that outlines the respective roles of anthropology and history, at a time when the latter was emerging as one of the most high-profile and innovative disciplines in the social sciences, as demonstrated by the prominent place it was given within the newly founded "Sixth Section" of the École Pratique des Hautes Études,

ancestor of today's École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Lévi-Strauss himself was a member of the "Fifth Section," devoted to the "Religious Studies").

In retrospect, it seems clear that the publication of *Structural Anthropology* marked a crucial stage in the rise and spread of structuralism. The carefully conceived organization of the book undoubtedly played an essential role in this. It highlighted the extremely innovative character of the thought as well as the theoretical ambition of a body of work that relied on very precise anthropological data even while opening up onto other disciplines (linguistics, history, psychoanalysis, etc.) and the anglophone literature in the field. It thus lent the work a certain force, further enhanced by its programmatic title. It should be recalled that this was by no means a sure bet. Against the sense of inexorability conveyed by retrospective accounts, which lay out a chronology of editorial and institutional successes, it is important to remember that the adjective "structural" was considered at the time to be something of a vulgarism and that the entire enterprise was a bit of a gamble. After all, intellectual history is strewn with stillborn neologisms, conceived in the heat of the moment as banners and manifestos.

Structural Anthropology was thus both more than and altogether different from collections of contributions artificially bound together by a title. This is also true of *Structural Anthropology, Volume II*, which came out in 1973 and whose organization is rather similar to that of the first volume: the "Perspective Views" that explore the history and pre-history of modern anthropology are followed by two sections, entitled "Social Organization" and "Mythology and Ritual," closing with a final (and long) section entitled "Humanism and the Humanities." Here again, the order reflected stages of thought, with chronology playing no part. The book even concludes with the essay "Race and History," which had been first published twenty years earlier, in 1952; however innovative it might have been (and still is), this short treatise on cultural diversity and evolutionism had not found its rightful place within the architecture of the first volume – more affirmative and more disciplinary, less concerned with locating anthropology within a set of reflections that made the destiny of humanity its object – while it provided an ideal complement to meditations on the notions of humanism and progress.

Although its structure differed from that of the two previous volumes, *The View from Afar* – published in 1983 and which Lévi-Strauss would have gladly entitled *Structural Anthropology, Volume III*, had the adjective not by then become trite and "lost its content" due to its

status as an intellectual "fashion"[3] – obeyed the same principle. Less strictly anthropological, the book engages more directly with the theories and ideologies of its time, through a discussion of the various forms of constraint that weigh on human activity.

In any case, two conclusions may be drawn. First, the *Structural Anthropology* volumes were indeed conceived as books – i.e. as theoretical interventions into debates that they sought to shape and not as simple collections of essays. Second, the way Lévi-Strauss understood anthropology, its methods and objects, did not evolve much over the course of his career. The only true exception is probably with regard to the status of the distinction between nature and culture: initially presented (in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, in 1949) as an anthropological invariant, in line with social science since its origins in the eighteenth century, it became a distinction of "primarily methodological importance," according to his formulation in *The Savage Mind* in 1962.[4] With the exception of this shift, in keeping with his redefinition of the concept of symbol,[5] Lévi-Strauss's thought remained very faithful to a few governing principles, and its evolution has to do more with the diversity of objects to which it was applied than with any change in the "rustic convictions" (to quote *Tristes Tropiques*) that guided his project.

A prehistory of structural anthropology

In 1957, Lévi-Strauss collected the seventeen articles that were to form *Structural Anthropology*, selecting them from among "some one hundred papers written during the past thirty years" (according to the brief preface he wrote for the occasion). In addition to two unpublished contributions, he settled on fifteen articles, the oldest of which had been published in 1944. The idea that Lévi-Strauss neglected the writings of his "youth" in favor of more recent work, which demonstrated greater intellectual maturity, is thus unfounded. Quite the contrary, the table of contents reflects the work of careful selection. This is the first observation at the origin of the present volume, *Structural Anthropology Zero*,[6] which brings together seventeen articles that Lévi-Strauss rejected when he composed the 1958 volume. Some of his decisions are easily enough understood and, indeed, Lévi-Strauss himself offered explanations for them: "I have made a choice, rejecting works of purely ethnographic and descriptive character, as well as others of theoretical scope but the substance of which has been incorporated into my book *Tristes Tropiques*." Other texts, such as "The

Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History" (chapter XII of the present volume), had probably appeared dated: the sense of wonder was still there, but progress in the discipline had rendered the theoretical point (in this case, diffusionist questions) obsolete. Finally, some of the studies seemed to have been superseded by more recent ones, as for instance "Indian Cosmetics" (chapter XI), which, in 1942, had provided readers of the American surrealist review *VVV* with a detailed description of Kaduveo makeup, the in-depth analysis of which was yet to come in *Tristes Tropiques*. Similarly, the long presentation of "French Sociology" (chapter I) must also have seemed outdated to Lévi-Strauss, superseded by his *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, published in 1950.[7]

We were thus left with a loss, which the present collection seeks to remedy. A loss because the final selection effectively excluded many insights – such as, for example, certain passages of "The Theory of Power in a Primitive Society" (chapter VIII), on which Lévi-Strauss amply drew in *Tristes Tropiques*, yet whose remarkable final considerations on the notion of "natural power" were left out; or, to take another example, the very dense discussion of Durkheim's work found in "French Sociology" but that did not find its way into the 1950 study on the work of Mauss – itself an important and difficult article, the much discussed "bible of structuralism," into which the 1945 text on Durkheim provides much insight.[8] But a loss also because Lévi-Strauss's selection left out articles that did not fit with the theoretical project of *Structural Anthropology* yet played a major role in the development of other ideas outside the scope of structuralism. This is the case for both "War and Trade among the Indians of South America" (chapter VII), as well as "The Theory of Power in a Primitive Society." Both of these articles are essential references for social and political theories that take native societies of South America as examples of societies with low levels of material wealth and minimal political organization, and thus social forms that preceded the state and the primitive accumulation of capital – ideas in political anthropology, of which Pierre Clastres is the most notable illustration.[9] The same can be said of the article "The Social Use of Kinship Terms among Brazilian Indians" (chapter XIII). Whereas Lévi-Strauss had partially drawn on it for his minor dissertation *The Family and Social Life of the Nambikwara Indians*, the article was rediscovered by Brazilian scholars in the 1990s and has become, alongside other ethnographic works of the 1940s, a central reference for one of the most important developments in recent anthropology: the reconstruction of Amerindian ontologies through the extension of the notion of affinity with the non-human world. "Initially envisioned

as an internal mechanism for the constitution of local groups, affinity has since appeared as a relational dynamic that organizes extra-local relations, articulates people and groups of people beyond kinship, and finally as a language and relational schema between Self and Other, identity and difference."[10]

Finally, we can easily see how "Techniques for Happiness" (chapter VI), an amusing yet profound reflection on modern American society as Lévi-Strauss experienced it from the inside in the 1940s, did not fit into the theoretical collection he had in mind in 1957. Written in 1944 and published a year later in the journal *L'Âge d'Or*, it was subsequently republished in 1946 in a special issue of the journal *Esprit* on "Homo Americanus," alongside contributions by American writers and thinkers (Kenneth Burke, Margaret Mead), as well as by other exiled intellectuals in the United States during the war (Georges Gurvitch, Denis de Rougemont). Its tone anticipated the more "liberated" meditations of the 1970s and 1980s (such as "New York in 1941" in *The View from Afar* and the texts of the posthumous collection *We Are All Cannibals*) but, unlike these, the 1945 article conveyed a sense of concern, even anxiety, with an ample dose of the ambivalence of all participant observation. The text is imbued with a mixture of fascination for and rejection of North American society, which was rather commonplace at the time, but with a content that was quite original. As in the horrified pages of *Tristes Tropiques* on South Asia, it shows the anthropologist fighting his own aversions (for the almighty imperative of social harmony, the generalized infantilization, the impossibility of solitude, etc.) and attempting to overcome them in a theoretical comparison with European societies. If his aversion here is less visceral than in the descriptions of Calcutta crowds, the text also reveals a subjectivity grappling with its own discomfort and which, in an effort to distance itself from a purely reactive (or simply condescending) form of anti-Americanism, tries to grasp as accurately as possible, through formulations that are sometimes spot on, some of the fundamental traits of North American society: the heterogeneity with itself of a society whose "skeletal structure … is still external" ("alternately amazed and appalled, it discovers itself every day from the outside"); its repudiation of the tragic dimension through a "relentless" sociability; and the ideals of a "childhood without malice," an "adolescence without hatred" and a "humanity without rancor" – a denial of the contradictions of social life that sometimes culminates, through a kind of return of the repressed, in conflicts between communities of an inordinate violence (p. 98).[11]

Notwithstanding his repeated homages to the country that "very probably saved his life," and to its universities and libraries, his genuine and profound misgivings about the United States are palpable, which would be confirmed a few years later by his categorical refusal of offers from Talcott Parsons and Clyde Kluckhohn (with vigorous encouragement from Roman Jakobson) of a position at Harvard. "I knew in my bones that I belonged to the Old World, irrevocably."[12] As with the chapters of *Tristes Tropiques* on Pakistan and Islam – which, although written based on notes from 1950, mention only very fleetingly the massacres and massive population displacements that followed the partition of India – the contemporary reader of "Techniques for Happiness" may also be struck by the silences and blind spots typical of the times and to the position of the observer who, even though called upon to give witness on American society, wonders about the utter estrangement between "generations, sexes and classes" but barely mentions segregation and racial conflict.[13]

The present volume is thus intended to make available important yet often lesser known contributions, most of which were originally published in English in various journals, and many of which have become difficult to find.[14] In addition to their intrinsic interest, the seventeen articles Lévi-Strauss decided to omit in 1958 represent a kind of prehistory of structural anthropology; they allow us, through a process of cross-checking, to grasp better both the theoretical project and its meaning for Claude Lévi-Strauss, the person, in the mid-1950s.

New York, 1941–1947

But there's more. For the present volume is not made simply of residues, of "odds and ends," as Lévi-Strauss liked to say in English. Its coherence is not a negative one only. It is, first and foremost, shaped by a place and a time: New York in the years 1941 to 1947. The articles collected here were all written by Lévi-Strauss during his American, and we could even say New York, period, first as a Jewish refugee – a scholar in exile, saved by the rescue plan for European academics of the Rockefeller Foundation – and then as the cultural attaché of the French embassy. They were published between 1942 and 1949 – i.e. before *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, whose publication marks a felicitous chronological milestone: it dates (superficially but conveniently) the beginning of structuralism, as well as for Lévi-Strauss himself the moment of definitive return to France and national reintegration through the dissertation ritual and the obtention of a research

position at the French national research center (CNRS), even if, in both his personal and professional life, the late 1940s and early 1950s were a troubled period.

These seventeen articles thus reflect a biographical and historical turning point. They reveal the young anthropologist honing his skills and finding his way in American anthropology – a discipline that was older and more established than in France – as a South America specialist, and more specifically of the "lowlands," thus called to distinguish the region from the great Andean civilizations that had garnered most of the attention of researchers on South America until the 1930s. This volume includes five ethnographic articles, three of which are drawn from the major six-volume work *Handbook of South American Indians*, edited by Julian H. Steward (a publication that, as recently as 2001, and despite its shortcomings, Lévi-Strauss did not consider to have been made obsolete by more recent work).[15] These articles provide an ample rejoinder to the reproach, often made of Lévi-Strauss, that the philosopher by training had a "theoretical bias" and that his approach to native peoples was overly abstract and lacked empirical grounding.

In these articles of the 1940s, Lévi-Strauss appears, on the contrary, as a meticulous ethnographer, not at all a theoretician. Coming from philosophy, via sociology, he now wrote as an expert on the tribes of the Brazilian plateau, at a time when the discipline was focused mostly on questions of tribal identification, of mapping territory and describing practices, from a diffusionist perspective, or at least a perspective informed by the history of South American migration and settlement. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss appears very much as a typical anthropologist of his time: he has read all of the existing literature, but his fieldwork experience is limited (a few weeks with the Bororo and the Nambikwara, later recounted in *Tristes Tropiques*). Yet the tributes he paid to Bronisław Malinowski, and even more so to Curt Nimuendajú (chapters I and V) – both accomplished fieldworkers on whom he lavished praise – show that he laid great store by prolonged ethnographic work. Indeed, he sensed that such stays – long, solitary periods of "immersion" in the society under study – would become the norm in the discipline, rightly announcing that, "in the future, anthropological works will probably be classified as 'pre-Malinowskian' or 'post-Malinowskian,' according to the degree to which the author shall have committed himself personally" (p. 64). It remains the case, however, that Lévi-Strauss himself (who, by his own admission, considered himself to be "a library man, not a fieldworker")[16] earned his stripes as an ethnographer through a different and older model of

fieldwork – i.e. group expeditions, focused primarily on information gathering, that spent only a few days with the populations – that is reflected in his contributions to the *Handbook*, which all conform to the same model. In these texts, as well as in his first article of 1936 on the Bororo Indians (which had drawn Robert Lowie's attention and led indirectly to his participation in the Rockefeller Foundation rescue operation), the intention is first and foremost descriptive, even when first-hand; it focuses on empirical data (material culture, technologies, life stages), and only very brief reflections on social organization or religious or magical forms. The articles' value lies in the informed distillations they offer of intermittent and heterogeneous sources, often separated by decades, if not centuries.

There is also a strong dimension of initiation in this work for the young French anthropologist, joining a group project in the discipline at a time when taking ethnographic censuses and inventories remained the chief concern of American anthropology, with a prevailing sense of urgency concerning populations threatened by demographic and cultural collapse. Julian H. Steward himself conceived of the *Handbook* as a form of applied anthropology designed to integrate traditional native communities into the new nation-states of the continent. These texts show the degree to which he had assimilated the dominant issues of American anthropology at the time; for that reason, the terminology is sometimes obsolete, especially in the use of the then common notion of "cultural level" and "level of culture," which referred to the degree of complexity of social organization and to the more or less rudimentary character of the material culture under study. Lévi-Strauss would later abandon these kinds of formulations because of the evolutionist connotations they retained, even among American anthropologists keen to steer clear of any evolutionism.

This experience of integration into a foreign disciplinary project had the effect above all of leading Lévi-Strauss – erstwhile professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo, sent to Brazil by the Durkheimian Célestin Bouglé – to take stock of the theoretical tradition from whence he came. Many of the articles in the present volume thus try to situate the French social science tradition, and to determine its particularity, in relation to other national traditions. There is no better example of this than the rigorous literature review "French Sociology" (chapter I), written at the request of Georges Gurvitch for a book that was first published in English under the title *Twentieth Century Sociology*. In this extended study, dedicated to Marcel Mauss, Lévi-Strauss presents the major lights of the discipline, as well as a few figures outside the mainstream, before proceeding to

a detailed discussion of Durkheim's work, astutely demonstrating the ways in which it constantly vacillates between a "historical perspective" and a "functional perspective," between the search for primary facts devoid of explanatory value and a social theory that sets ends for itself but cuts itself off from empirical observation. This wavering, as Lévi-Strauss goes on to explain, is based on an implicit assumption of discontinuity between "the psychological and sociological perspectives," between the analysis of representations and that of institutions. It was to be Mauss's undertaking to resolve this dilemma by making symbolic activity not the result but a condition of social life, thus restoring continuity between individual consciousness, group representations and social organization. Lévi-Strauss then delves into his core argument – i.e. a response to the critique levelled at French sociology by the great American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, who accused it of lacking methodological rigor and of being overly abstract and insufficiently attuned to the concrete realities of fieldwork. This recurring accusation on the part of American anthropologists since the 1920s and continuing to the present day – indeed, Lévi-Strauss himself would become one of its chief targets – clearly exercised the young anthropologist who was about to take up a diplomatic posting and to play a more active role in the "cultural influence" of a country that had not yet fully emerged from war (he was writing in late 1944 or very early 1945). Lévi-Strauss first concedes to Kroeber that the "philosophical ancestry" of the *Année Sociologique* group led its members to neglect fieldwork, but only so as better to point out that the resulting deficiency was about to be remedied: "The next generation of French sociologists, who reached maturity around 1930, has, over the last fifteen years, almost entirely – but no doubt temporarily – given up theoretical work in order to make up for this shortcoming" (p. 50). In support of this claim, he cites the recent ethnographic work of Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, Jacques Soustelle, Alfred Métraux, Roger Bastide, Georges Devereux and Denise Paulme, as well as his own.

Lévi-Strauss turns his attention above all to Kroeber's critique of Mauss, a critique which he considered full of "misunderstandings" but that "raised essential questions" and prompted him to mount a forceful theoretical clarification. Kroeber's argument is classic: he reproached Durkheim and Mauss for using categories, such as those of "suicide" and "gift," that were neither indigenous notions nor rigorous concepts on which to base a scientific argument. Lévi-Strauss replied that, unless one is prepared to give up on scientific study as a matter of principle, one had to begin somewhere, with what was given to observation. But he also made clear that these categories were not in any way the end

point of the analysis and that, on the contrary, they gradually disappeared from the study. Indeed, they served only to access a deeper level of reality that could not be reached through simple observation but whose explanatory value was greater – the integration of the individual to the group in the case of suicide, the demand for reciprocity in the case of gifting. Against Kroeber, who denied to anthropology the status of a real science, and against American cultural anthropology more broadly, Lévi-Strauss thus reaffirmed the validity of Durkheimian methodological principles ("For our part, we remain convinced that social facts must be studied as things," he would still write in 1948 (p. 85) – it was the atomistic and mechanistic conception of these "things" that he found wanting in Durkheim), as well as the ambition, at once explanatory and universalist, of anthropology.[17] This article (as well as other articles from the period) also expresses for the first time one of Lévi-Strauss's deep concerns, namely the fear that the otherwise legitimate critique of nineteenth-century evolutionism might reduce anthropology to a mere compilation of monograph studies void of any comparative horizon or universal claim: "Are we condemned, like new Danaids, endlessly to fill the sieve-like basket of anthropological science, vainly pouring monograph after monograph, without ever being able to collect a substance with a richer and denser value?" (p. 117). In retrospect, this was to be the main benefit of his prolonged stay in the United States, which made him aware of the rut in which the discipline could get stuck: aimless accumulation. Thus, with an ambition, intelligence and capacity for hard work bordering on madness, he took it upon himself to pull anthropology out of this rut and to infuse it once again with the mission of achieving "a truth endowed with general validity" (p. 117).

There are two points to be made here. First, that many of these articles initially appear anecdotal but in fact represent occasions for more robust theoretical reflection; and, second, this reflection is itself directly linked to Lévi-Strauss's own condition of exile at the time he was writing them. At first glance, many of the pieces gathered here – historical overviews, reviews and tributes – appear not to be making any argument. However, even the tribute to Malinowski makes no secret of Lévi-Strauss's "serious doubts" with regard to the former's theoretical work, paving the way for "History and Anthropology" (the first chapter of *Structural Anthropology*). His critique of Malinowskian functionalism and its tautological character grew stronger over the years (see chapters I and V, in particular). The unexpected, and seemingly curious, rehabilitation of Edward Westermarck (chapter III) can be seen in a similar light. The Finnish sociologist's attempts to

account for the prohibition of incest in his 1891 work *The History of Human Marriage* had indeed already been largely discredited, especially by Durkheim and, more broadly, by the critics of nineteenth-century British evolutionism. But in his obituary written in 1945, six years after Westermarck's death (the war accounting for the delay), Lévi-Strauss reviews the criticisms raised by the work only to highlight its merits (its theoretical ambition and erudition, its "insistence on a sociology that could furnish a comprehensive explanation," the link maintained between sociology and psychology, its "dissatisfaction with historical and local explanation") and, more importantly, to reformulate the question in a way that was to play a decisive role in his subsequent work: "At the root of the prohibition of incest lies neither the physiological link of kinship, nor the psychological link of proximity, but the fraternal or paternal link, in its exclusively institutional dimension" (p. 72). In other words, the moral rule that prohibits incest finds its source and explanation in an entirely social imperative – we are thus getting very close to the sensational reversal that later opened *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* and its reading of the incest taboo not as a prohibition but as an obligation to exogamy.

In the same way, technical or anecdotal pieces such as "On Dual Organization in South America" (chapter XIV) or "The Name of the Nambikwara" (chapter IV) provide occasions for theoretical clarification, whether on the historicity of forms of social organization (and the status of the historical hypothesis in anthropology) or on the question of the naming of native tribes, which is often a false problem threatening to engulf anthropology in sterile academic disputes. At first glance, the title of "Reciprocity and Hierarchy" (chapter IX) may appear somewhat misleading, but, beyond the detailed discussions of the terms used to designate the other moieties in Bororo communities, what is at stake is the persistent principle of reciprocity at the root of social life, even when relations of subordination would appear to prevail.

It is in the book reviews that Lévi-Strauss's dialogue with American anthropology is most vigorously pursued. The five reviews (chapter V) included here are all little known and yet of far-reaching significance (and continuing relevance, seventy years after they were first published). Written for *L'Année Sociologique* (a journal founded by Durkheim, whose publication had just resumed after the war), they all focus on works published in the United States – Lévi-Strauss acting as emissary for an American anthropological tradition that was still largely unknown in France. Two of the reviews had indeed already been published in English, but the French adaptations that Lévi-Strauss

submitted were often less restrained than the original versions and provided him with an opportunity to launch more forceful attacks on what he saw as the dead ends being pursued by anglophone anthropology – be it functionalism and its "providentialist" tendencies or the American school about to claim the name "culture and personality," which outrageously simplified the relationship between individual psychology and culture and accorded far too much importance to native autobiographies.

In still more incisive fashion, he targeted the so-called "acculturation" studies that were beginning to develop in the United States, which focused on the transformation of native societies that were losing their former ways of life under the influence of a dominant modern civilization. Lévi-Strauss strongly disapproved of the ecumenical functionalist premise that led these groups threatened with demographic and cultural collapse to be considered as objects comparable to traditional societies, on the grounds that they were "functioning" communities. The tone is both pessimistic – Lévi Strauss draws a particularly grim picture of these degraded societies, which is not sparing of individuals – and accusatory – for the relationship of equivalence according to which "all human community is a sociological object, simply by virtue of the fact that it exists" (p. 89), which appears as epistemological tolerance and axiological neutrality, serves in fact to mask the violence of the confrontation; he sees in it an attempt on the part of a civilization to deny responsibility for having imposed on others paths that were not of their own choosing. We can see two forms of history emerging here: on the one hand, a history of borrowings and exchanges between societies and of their development under mutual influence; and, on the other, an external history of destruction, a tragic chronicle of the annihilation of ancient social forms by an exorbitant Western civilization. The first can constitute an object of scientific inquiry and is essential for the anthropologist; the second is a function only of the power imbalances at play and the hubris of a devastating modernity with respect to other cultures, as well as to a natural world it is irreparably defiling.

However, what is most important to understand is that this body of work was profoundly shaped by Lévi-Strauss's expatriation and the particularity of his New York experience during the war years and the years immediately afterwards.[18] Indeed, what all these texts have in common is that they were written either in exile or over the course of a diplomatic career, which, although brief and repeatedly minimized by Lévi-Strauss in subsequent interviews, was far from idle,[19] yet constantly subject to a dynamic of double-estrangement with regard

to the intellectual traditions of both home and host country. These years were also ones of professionalization and, more generally, of a reconfiguring of Lévi-Strauss's intellectual and social identity – as well as of his private life, having separated from his first wife on the eve of World War II. This process was aided by his family connections in New York, which facilitated his integration and made it possible for him to circulate between different heterogeneous worlds,[20] as well as his extraordinary capacity for hard work, which enabled him to digest the entirety of the anthropological literature contained in the New York Public Library and to become proficient in the English language (with his local aunt's help) and so, very early on, to write his first articles in English.[21] In this respect, his experience of exile is entirely distinct from that of other, older intellectuals, such as Georges Gurvitch, not to mention André Breton, with whom Lévi-Strauss spent time in New York, and who made it a point of honour to speak only in French.[22] Enjoined, as it were, by his position as a foreigner, with an uncertain status and professional future (he had not yet defended his dissertation), Lévi-Strauss was forced to determine his own intellectual tradition and to hone his own ideas. And herein lies another reason for collecting these articles: not only as tribute to a singular individual experience and historical moment but also as testimony and lesson on the historical and sociological conditions of intellectual invention.

Tabula rasa

These texts of the 1940s, which Lévi-Strauss later chose to set aside, offer a window onto an emerging structuralism, a perspective that rejects seeing it as nothing more than an intellectual fad of the 1960s, as some facile and superficial accounts would have it. Structuralism can thus be viewed as a European movement that was born in the United States, in response to a crisis in functionalism and to the deadlock of American nominalism, which rejected the idea of comparing cultural entities on the grounds that each was irreducible and singular. The teachers and researchers of the École Libre des Hautes Études did not all become structuralists. Yet these exiled intellectuals, many of whom were Jewish, shared a common commitment to a comparative approach. The specifically structuralist project within this general orientation was thus to restore an epistemological status to intercultural comparison.[23] These articles also show that the genesis of structuralism was by no means a linear process. The birth of structural anthropology is too often presented as a kind of "accession," the crowning moment of a

glorious sequence that begins with Lévi-Strauss's lack of peer recognition upon returning to France (he was twice rejected by the Collège de France, in 1949 and 1950, and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* initially met with a lukewarm response), followed by the publication of *Tristes Tropiques* in 1955 and that of *Structural Anthropology* in 1958, and culminating finally in his election to the Collège de France in 1959. However, returning to these older texts helps us to understand that this sequence did not result from the intrinsic power of structuralist theory, ultimately prevailing over all obstacles and opposition. It was, instead, made possible by a work of reconstruction, selection and "repression," undertaken by Lévi-Strauss himself, in relation to certain aspects of his own thought. One essential dimension of his writing, in particular, was excised, namely any role for political commitment in anthropological reflection – a concern that was indeed to disappear entirely from the anthropologist's work from *Structural Anthropology* onward. This is perhaps the most original and striking aspect of the articles collected in this volume.

We now know that political activism played a major part in the life of the young Lévi-Strauss. A member of the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) at age eighteen, then secretary of the Groupe d'Études Socialistes from 1927, he founded the Révolution Constructive group in 1931, together with ten of his *agrégation* classmates, to give the party a new intellectual face. While serving as assistant to SFIO deputy Georges Monnet in 1930, he ran unsuccessfully for local office in the town of Mont-de-Marsan, to whose secondary school he had been appointed as a teacher in 1933. The image of Lévi-Strauss as a melancholy anthropologist withdrawn from the world and devoted to the study of vanished civilizations is thus a later construction. The work of intellectual history that, in the 1980s and 1990s, rediscovered the political commitments of his youth did not radically transform his public image. Lévi-Strauss himself dated the end of his political "career" to his unsuccessful electoral run, which he jokingly attributed to a car accident.[24] The Citroën he had bought for the campaign ended up in a ditch, which seemed in retrospect to have marked a turning point: indeed, only a few months later, Lévi-Strauss was sent to teach sociology in Brazil, where he would launch a career in anthropology that had no links with his earlier political ambitions. Yet a careful reading of his 1940s writings shows that, far from having given up on his "political illusions," well into his adulthood, Lévi-Strauss did not separate his scholarly work from his political thinking, in which he was already anticipating the post-war context, as confirmed by his activities in circles associated with the École Libre

des Hautes Études as well as in international intellectual networks. His early return to France – the war was not yet over – and his subsequent appointment as cultural attaché show that he had been identified by the Gaullist political machine as a reliable man.

It is through a few incidental remarks that this political dimension is first revealed. For instance, the teleological bent he perceived in Durkheim paradoxically places the founder of sociology together with the reactionary Louis de Bonald. Hence the worried observation: "Obviously, any social order could take such a doctrine as a pretext for crushing individual thought and spontaneity" (p. 56). And yet: "All moral, social and intellectual progress has made its first appearance as a revolt of the individual against the group" (p. 56). This was yet another reason for rejecting Malinowski's functionalism, which indeed retained from Durkheim only the all-powerful group and thereby appeared as a "system of interpretation … which makes it dangerously possible to justify any regime whatsoever" (p. 64). The critique is epistemological (functionalism leads to circular assertions), but the forcefulness of its tone is due to the potential political consequences of the challenged thesis. Conversely, Westermarck is rehabilitated for theoretical reasons, yet his analytical rigor "confers on his work a critical and politically engaged quality of which he was fully aware." "In his view, moral evolution had a meaning: it was going to bring humanity closer to an ideal of liberalism and rationalism, to free it from its errors and prejudices. … He considered the relativist critique to be an instrument of spiritual emancipation" (p. 75).

More generally, the circumstances in which these texts were written reveal that they were often part of a collective process of political reflection. Indeed, "The Theory of Power in a Primitive Society" (chapter VIII), which was first published in English in 1944, was originally part of a series of "lectures" on "modern political doctrines" given at the École Libre des Hautes Études, which included presentations on human rights, on the various conceptions of the state, and on the political thought of Louis de Bonald and Charles Maurras. As the jurist Boris Mirkine-Guetzévitch pointed out in the foreword to the publication of these contributions, the series was originally intended as the continuation of another series, on the end of the French Third Republic and its supplantation by the Vichy regime, insisting on the urgent need for scholars from various disciplines to work together and to collaborate in confronting the problems of the day. In the same way, "The Foreign Policy of a Primitive Society" (chapter X) was initially published in the journal *Politique etrangère*, which, beginning in the 1930s, distinguished itself in condemning the delusions of the

economic and international policies of Nazi Germany. Suspended in 1939, it had just started publishing again in 1949 when Lévi-Strauss contributed his article, which appeared alongside studies on "the refugee problem," "the United States, the USSR and the Chinese problem," and the position of a soon to be divided Germany. The originality of Lévi-Strauss's article does not lie in the description, already published elsewhere, of the exchanges between Nambikwara bands observed on the Brazilian plateau in August and September of 1938 (to be found in part seven of *Tristes Tropiques*). As the end of the article makes clear, the point was to take the Nambikwara's "foreign policy" as a model because this community "represents one of the most elementary forms of social life" and can thus serve as the basis for a more general reflection on the relations between foreign groups.[25] The ambition of this article – which, on the face of it, describes only the particular situation of the Amerindians of Mato Grosso – lies in a desire to contribute to the reconfiguration of international relations in a world devastated by a second world war and soon to enter into a cold one.

The article is thus filled with statements that spoke to the reader of 1949 in ways that are probably not as clear to us today. This is true of the final lines that condemn the naïve optimism of "our current preoccupations, which would have us think about human problems in terms of open societies, of ever more open societies." This is an allusion to Henri Bergson's reflections, taken up by Karl Popper in his 1945 work *The Open Society and its Enemies*, in which Lévi-Strauss detected the excesses of "Christian and democratic thought," which, by constantly expanding the "limits of the human group," failed to see the need to think of humanity as an ensemble of groups whose tendencies toward excessive aggression as well as collaboration needed to be regulated (p. 147). We should also take the measure, four years after the world became aware of the extermination camps, of the resonance of the following pronouncement: "There is always a point beyond which a man ceases to take part in the essential attributes of humanity … Yet this denial of human status [in so-called primitive societies] only very rarely takes on an aggressive character. For if humanity is denied to certain groups, they are not comprised of men and, as a consequence, one does not behave in relation to them as one would with other human beings" (p. 145). This is the main argument of the article: the violence of one group toward another is itself a recognition of the possibility of partnership; sheer negation of the other manifests only as lack of interest and "strategies of avoidance." Aggressiveness between two groups must thus be thought of as "a function of another, antithetical,