

CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS AND THE SEARCH FOR STRUCTURE

“Such is how I view myself,” wrote Lévi-Strauss in his autobiography, *Tristes Tropiques* (1964), “a traveller, an archaeologist of space, trying in vain to restore the exotic with the help of fragments and debris.” Like Rousseau two centuries before him, Lévi-Strauss insisted upon the virtue of primitive peoples. Yet he went beyond Rousseau. Dissecting the art, myths, and folkways of traditional societies, he sought to find a common code or “grammar” underlying the world’s diverse cultural arrangements. His quest led to a bold reevaluation of “savage” thinking, which in turn yielded fresh insights into the workings of the human mind. As anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis explains, Lévi-Strauss’s search for structure has powerful reverberations in academia and beyond, even to this day.

by David Maybury-Lewis

People always and everywhere have wanted to believe that there is some sort of pattern in human affairs. They have seen their lives as part of a grand design but until comparatively recently have maintained that this design was only fully intelligible to the gods or to God, and that it would be hubris for ordinary mortals to aspire to a deep knowledge of it.

This attitude began to change with the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the growth of the scientific spirit in Europe. After thinkers such as Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) and Charles-Louis Montesquieu (1689–1755) had the audacity to suggest that mere mortals, too, might be able to understand the grand design, the idea began to take hold that human societies could be studied scientifically as parts of the natural world.



Claude Lévi-Strauss, in a 1963 photograph.

Many 19th-century anthropologists felt that they could and should classify the societies of the world in much the same way as museums classify the world's flora and fauna. By refining these classifications (as they learned more about exotic peoples) and applying to them the powerful new evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, anthropologists would develop nothing less than a natural science of *human* societies.

Probably the most influential of these anthropologists was Lewis Henry Morgan, who sought in two major works, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871) and *Ancient Society* (1877), to demonstrate the mechanisms of social evolution. He argued that human societies had passed through stages characterized by technological advances, which gave rise to new family systems and forms of political control. The thesis impressed Friedrich Engels, who summarized and embellished it in his own book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), with the eventual result that Morgan became the patron saint of anthropology in communist countries.

There were skeptics, of course, but the idea of a "science" of society proved to be a vision of enduring inspiration. It was a vision that found an eloquent spokesman in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, professor

of social anthropology at Oxford at the time of World War II. Radcliffe-Brown argued for a social anthropology that would be nothing less than a comparative sociology of all the peoples of the world—a herculean task which demanded that anthropologists be able to describe the structures of human societies so that they could be compared and classified.

In a major treatise on the Australian aborigines, *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1931), Radcliffe-Brown diagrammed the clan systems and marriage arrangements of each tribal society. It was clear that he thought his diagrams represented the “structures” of the societies he was discussing. Did this mean that the aborigines’ other ideas and institutions were somehow not part of the structure? To Radcliffe-Brown’s critics, this seemed both implausible and unsatisfactory. After all, the aborigines might have seemed incredibly “primitive” to the Europeans who first met them (because of their simple Stone Age technology), but later students noted the aborigines’ penchant for philosophical speculation, their elaborate religious life, and the complexity of their social organization.



If Radcliffe-Brown’s notion of *structure* was dubious with regard to the Australian aborigines, how was it to be applied to India or the United States? And if not generally applicable, how could it become the basis for a scientific study of all the societies of the world? Many anthropologists were reluctant to abandon this vision of their discipline, though the comparative science they longed for seemed as elusive as ever. By the 1950s they had reached the stage where they were talking about structure more but enjoying it less. It was at this moment of impasse that Lévi-Strauss came to the rescue with a different and even more ambitious kind of structuralism.

A Belgian-born Frenchman, Lévi-Strauss had studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, and was doing a stint of secondary-school teaching when the University of Paris invited him to go to Brazil as one of several professors sent to help build up the programs of the University of São Paulo. In 1935, at the age of 27, he arrived in São Paulo and began teaching sociology. During the next few years he went on several expeditions into the Brazilian interior. He became fascinated

David Maybury-Lewis, 58, a former Wilson Center Fellow, is professor of anthropology at Harvard University. Born in Hyderabad (now Pakistan), he received a B.A. from Cambridge University (1952) and a D. Phil. from Oxford University (1960). His many books include The Savage and the Innocent (1965), Akwê-Shavante Society (1967), Dialectical Societies (1979). He also contributed papers to Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero (1970). He is now working on a book dealing with structuralism and social organization. Copyright © 1988 by David Maybury-Lewis.

by the study of the Indians he met. He returned to France in 1939, in time to join the army at the outbreak of World War II.

Following the defeat of France, Lévi-Strauss, who came from a Jewish family, managed to escape to New York City, where he secured a teaching job at the New School for Social Research, and began publishing his first works in ethnology. When the war ended, he served briefly as cultural attaché at the French embassy in Washington before returning to France in 1947. He has lived and taught in Paris ever since, being elected first to a chair of social anthropology at the Collège de France and then to the Académie Française.

The structuralism that he began to elaborate during the 1950s was a far cry from that of Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe-Brown spoke of societies having structures even as buildings or living creatures have structures. Lévi-Strauss suggested instead that scholars consider the structure of a society as being more like the grammar of a language. Here he took his cue from Roman Jakobson and Nikolay Trubetskoy, linguists of what had come to be known during the 1930s as the Prague School. These men had revolutionized linguistics by looking for the "deep structures" that shape the speech utterances of all languages. Lévi-Strauss proposed to apply a similar method to the study of human societies. The structures he aimed to uncover would be the hidden codes that generate social institutions and behaviors.

But how to uncover these deep structures?

Lévi-Strauss's examples were marvelously provocative. Rejecting the conventional divisions of subject matter that had fettered his scholarly predecessors, he tried to discern the patterns underlying peoples' ideas and institutions and often arrived at some startlingly unorthodox conclusions.



In *Tristes Tropiques*, he wrote eloquently of the Indian tribesmen whom he had met on his expeditions into the Brazilian hinterland. The Mbaya-Caduveo, for instance, had been renowned warriors when they first encountered the Portuguese invaders in the 16th century. Their nobles were arrogant seigneurs who scorned their inferiors, among whom they included the conquering Portuguese and Spanish. Dressed in stiff leather coats, they must have looked like supercilious face cards in a playing deck. Indeed, these haughty noblemen thought so highly of themselves that they refused to subject their women to the nuisance of child rearing. They either aborted noble offspring or killed them at birth. To replenish their ranks, they adopted children from below, thus bringing about a most unusual form of social mobility.

Lévi-Strauss related the exaggerated hierarchy of this society to the way its members painted (and still paint) themselves. Fascinated

by their complex but symmetrical face-painting, he concluded that the Mbaya-Caduveo designs expressed a yearning for the symmetry that did not exist in their society's hierarchical social institutions.

As Lévi-Strauss himself stated it: "The mysterious charm and (as it seems at first) the gratuitous complication of Caduveo art may well be a phantasm created by a society whose object was to give symbolic form to the institutions which it might have had in reality, had interest and superstition not stood in the way."

In *Tristes Tropiques* and a series of papers on social structure in *Structural Anthropology*, Volume I (1958), he suggested that the Bororo Indians of Central Brazil were likewise struggling to reconcile symmetry and asymmetry in their thought and social arrangements. He suggested that the prevailing scholarly view of Bororo society as highly symmetrical was mistaken. Like many traditional societies all over the world, the Bororo are formally divided into halves, or *moieties*. Every Bororo must belong to a moiety, and Bororo thought and life appear to be dominated by the interrelationship between moieties. Yet from other, asymmetric aspects of Bororo society, Lévi-Strauss concluded that the symmetries in Bororo society were a smoke screen that the Indians used to obscure the real asymmetry of their social arrangements.

For example, Bororo society ostensibly follows a symmetric system of intermarrying moieties, but in fact it also adheres to another rule dividing the moieties into Upper, Middle, and Lower segments. People in an Upper segment must marry from the Upper segment of another moiety. Lévi-Strauss argued that the asymmetry of Upper-Middle-Lower represented the true structure of Bororo society, which they are at great pains to conceal from themselves.



Anthropologists whose specialty was Brazilian Indians were intrigued but unconvinced. I, for one, noted errors in Lévi-Strauss's readings of the evidence from Brazilian societies and pointed out that—even discounting these errors—we had only been offered new readings of the data, which would have to be compared with previous readings. In fact, the symmetric readings of Bororo society are still more broadly explanatory than Lévi-Strauss's asymmetric one, and it is noteworthy that later, when Lévi-Strauss wrote at length about Bororo myth, he did not make use of his own previous insistence on asymmetry among the Bororo.

However, most of his readers had little interest in the Indians of Central Brazil. What fascinated them was the bold and imaginative attempt to get behind appearances, to dig beneath clans and moieties, and to discern the underlying "code" that had generated these social arrangements.

The analyses of Central Brazilian peoples could be passed over as mere preliminary examples. If the method worked elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss would have solved the problem that had stumped earlier analysts. The comparison of these codes, moreover, would make possible the generalizations about human beings, their ideas, and their societies that had hitherto proved so elusive.

But Lévi-Strauss's first major comparative work, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), did not reassure doubters.

Ever since anthropology emerged as a scholarly discipline in the mid-19th century, the subject of kinship has loomed large. For most of human history people organized their societies along familial lines, and many traditional societies still do. The relegation of kinship to the private sphere and the corresponding development of associations—corporations, unions, clubs—in the public-sphere, which are not (or at least are not supposed to be) based on kinship, is a relatively recent development.



Kinship itself is perplexing. All societies have to incorporate into their arrangements the fact that they can endure only if men and women produce and rear children. Yet the kinship systems built around these “facts of life” are as varied as human ingenuity can make them. There are, for example, wide differences in the way societies classify relatives. Some have no special word for “mother.” She is instead addressed by a term that refers to many other women of the first ascending generation. Some societies recognize descent only in the male line, others only in the female line. Yet others structure their systems by requiring marriage with certain cousins.

How can we understand and explain these variations?

Lévi-Strauss proposed a general theory of kinship, building on the sociological work of Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) concerning the central importance of gift exchanges in human affairs. Lévi-Strauss argued that human beings had passed from a state of nature to a state of culture—had in fact become human—the moment they prohibited incest. This prohibition, more than any other, separates the human from the animal world. Quite obviously, it leads to exogamy, the practice of “marrying out,” for if men may not take the women of their own family as mates, the system will work only if all other men are under the same prohibition. The imperative of marrying out forces all members of a social system to deal with and depend on outsiders; it lies at the root of perhaps the oldest ambivalence in human affairs. It also provides the tension that is released in jokes about in-laws, including a South African aphorism, quoted by Lévi-Strauss, which suggests that a relative by marriage is an elephant's hip—suffocating, presumably.

But the rule that one had to marry out of the family did not establish whom one did in fact marry. In early human societies, kinship was too important a matter to be left to chance or to individual whim. Systems of regular intermarriage among groups were therefore set up, and Lévi-Strauss demonstrated ingeniously how they could have resulted from the idea of marrying out but not too far out (i.e. marriage between certain kinds of first cousins). In fact, such systems exist in many parts of the world today, for example, among the Bedouins of the Middle East. We know how they work and also how they get around the problems of chance and demography to ensure that there are spouses available for everyone.

However, Lévi-Strauss did not intend his theory to apply only to those societies that prescribed marriage with specific first cousins. He argued, rather, that kinship systems existed essentially to regulate marriage, and that the institutionalization of these kinds of first-cousin marriages was the essential pattern from which all other systems (presumably the complex structures) were derived.



From this theory, he analyzed the caste system of India, the social organization of China, and the social arrangements of the American Indians. His arguments combined speculative leaps of inference with evidence that was so technical as to be unintelligible to nonspecialists. Yet those who could understand his arguments soon began to object. The theory was grand and many of the insights telling, but the evidence was questionable as were the inferences drawn from it.

Why should the prohibition of incest, rather than language or other institutions, be the distinguishing characteristic of humanity?

Were all kinship systems marriage systems in more than a trivial sense?

Was Lévi-Strauss's grand thesis borne out?

Was there in fact any real way of confirming it?

Soon, however, the doubters discovered that they were but-but-but-ing like pedantic outboard motors in the wake of a grand vision that was sailing, indeed soaring, away from them.

For Lévi-Strauss had moved on, writing a series of books that explored the nature of human thought itself. The most influential of these was *The Savage Mind* (1962). In it he considered the curious phenomenon of totemism, the widespread custom by which a person or a group of people is associated with some material thing or animal or species in the natural world. Lévi-Strauss concluded that totems were a matter of classification. The Australian aborigine, for example, who says, "I am a wallaby," is neither feeble-minded nor confused, and he certainly knows a great deal about wallabies. He is making a

symbolic statement to the effect that his clan is to other clans as wallabies are to other species.

Lévi-Strauss argued that both a propensity to classify and careful observation of the natural environment have been keys to human thinking since time immemorial. It was this combination that enabled mankind to make important discoveries during the Neolithic revolution, which Lévi-Strauss considers just as important in human affairs as the Industrial Revolution. The invention of agriculture, weaving, and pottery, for example, took place long before the advent of scientific thinking as we now know it. Moreover, isolated tribal societies in existence today also possess a detailed knowledge of their environment, which shows, according to Lévi-Strauss, that they likewise engage in speculative investigation and classification.

"Savage thought," Lévi-Strauss insisted, was as logical and systematic as "scientific thought," though it often reached different conclusions. He offered two reasons for this: Savage thought argues from different premises, and it refuses to accept a vacuum. Detailing the associative connections made in savage thinking, Lévi-Strauss pointed out that while science accepts "don't know" as its frontier, savage thought is *totalizing*. It insists on systems, which is why classification is such an important part of it.

By now it should be clear that savage thought is not the same thing as the thinking of savages, or at any rate not the same as the thinking of people we might be tempted to label as savages. On the contrary, it is the way people think much of the time, except when they are making an effort to be scientific. People who order their lives according to horoscopes (for which there is no scientific evidence), or who act on what we call "superstitions," or who believe that fluoridating their water is part of a conspiracy against them, or who fit their ideas into any one of a number of totalizing theories that go beyond the hard evidence, are thinking "savagely."



But the question still remains as to why some societies rely extensively on savage thought, while others, Eastern or Western, have developed an alternative way of thinking, which results in theoretical and abstract science. Lévi-Strauss's surprising answer is that theoretical science develops along with historical consciousness. In "cold" societies that see the world totemically, that is, as a system where everything fits into the grand scheme of classification, there is only savage thought. By contrast, people in "hot" societies see the world as being in a state of flux and try to explain it and themselves in historical terms—which in turn leads to scientific thinking.

The irony of this conclusion is that Lévi-Strauss ends up championing science but doubting history. *The Savage Mind* concludes

with a fierce attack on Jean-Paul Sartre's insistence in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) that history is a privileged form of knowledge. Lévi-Strauss argues convincingly to the contrary—that history as used by Sartre and most Western thinkers does not escape from ideology and subjectivity. Worse still, it is a cannibal pursuit that devours the peoples outside our Western tradition and ingests them into our own view of the world. But if historical consciousness does not enable us to get at a truth that is not culture-bound, we need not despair. The structuralist method will get us there.

In a quartet of books—*The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), *From Honey to Ashes* (1966), *The Origin of Table Manners* (1968), and *The Naked Man* (1971)—and innumerable shorter works, Lévi-Strauss embarked on a massive demonstration of the efficacy of scientific structuralism when applied to myth. He chose myth as an expression of pure thought, unconstrained by demography or ecology. In myths anything can happen, but only certain things do. Since myths follow recurring patterns, we could learn what and how myth tellers think if we could only learn to read these patterns. That would in turn teach us something about human thought and the universal structure of the human mind.



But how can we read myths correctly?

Lévi-Strauss gave his answer in "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955). He argued that myths are not simply just-so stories, intended to explain natural phenomena or other mysteries of life, nor are they parables. Rather, they are complex statements intended to resolve the painful contradictions of human experience. Their message cannot be derived simply (if at all) from the apparent "stories" that they tell. Instead, these stories have to be broken up and reordered so that we can perceive that certain elements of them hang together when contrasted with other groups of elements. The myth can then be "read" like a musical score and its real message deciphered.

Take perhaps the most famous myth in all Western civilization, the story of Oedipus. Lévi-Strauss arranges it in four columns (see opposite page). The story line runs from left to right in columns A-C, with column D adding a kind of symbolic glossary. But the real message of the myth, Lévi Strauss tells us, is in the relationship among the columns.

Column A refers to the over-rating of relations among kin.

Column B refers to the under-rating of relations among kin.

Column C refers to the killing of creatures that emerge from the earth.

Column D implies that these men have themselves been born from the earth, since in many myths one can recognize a man who

A Over-rating of kin	B Under-rating of kin	C Denying men born of earth	D Signs of men born of earth
Cadmos seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus	The Spartoi kill one another	Cadmos kills the dragon	Labdacos (Laios's father) = lame
Oedipus kills his father, Laios			Laios (Oedipus' father) = left- handedness
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta	Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices	Oedipus kills the Sphinx	Oedipus = swollen- foot (?)
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition			

has come up out of the earth by his awkwardness (such as left-handedness) or his difficulty in walking.

The message of the myth then is that A is to B as C is to D—the over-rating of kin is to the under-rating of them as the denial of origin from the earth is to the insistence on it. The purpose of the myth is to resolve the contradiction between Greek tradition—according to which men come up out of the ground—and Greek experience of the fact that they are born of women. It does this by likening one insoluble problem, one irresolvable contradiction, to another one that turns out to be not insoluble after all.

From this myth (or, as is more usual in Lévi-Strauss's analyses, from a system of myths), one learns that kin and *affine* (a relative by marriage), nature and culture, life and death are not eternal antithe-

ses that fragment human consciousness and human existence; they can indeed be reconciled. The interpretation of this myth, as of the hundreds of others that Lévi-Strauss has analyzed in his works, is both original and provocative. But, as usual, it poses problems.

Why should we suppose that the contradiction between origin from the earth and ordinary childbirth bothered the Greeks enough for them to invest intellectual and emotional energy in myths to resolve it? This contradiction is, after all, merely the difference between a theory of origins and the facts of human continuity. Modern Christian fundamentalists are not concerned by the "contradiction" between the story of Adam and Eve and the facts of childbirth any more than evolutionists are worried by the "contradiction" between the origin of the species and its present procreative habits.

Furthermore, can we be sure of Lévi-Strauss's interpretations of the meaning of various symbols in the myth? He refers to Kwakiutl and Pueblo myths that interpret difficulty in walking as an indication of emergence from the earth, but did it mean this to the Greeks?



Lévi-Strauss has a tendency to interpret myths as if they were fragments of some universal language spoken by all people at different times and places. But if it is a language that is so hard to decode, and if Lévi-Strauss can only decode Greek myths by referring to Hopi stories that the Greeks could not possibly have known, then who is saying what and to whom in this difficult language, and is anybody getting the message? A Swedish scholar, Bertil Nathorst, who considered this problem, concluded that the mythmakers must all be talking to Lévi-Strauss.

Of course it may be only we who have to use Hopi myths to decode Greek ones; the Greeks may not have needed to. Perhaps, too, Lévi-Strauss's insistence on the linguistic analogy should not be taken too literally. But the unorthodox brilliance of Lévi-Strauss's analyses, together with their grandiose theories, raises a host of similarly troubling questions. What in fact is the relationship of these analyses to the things they claim to explain?

It is a question which Lévi-Strauss blithely begs. In a famous passage from the introduction to *The Raw and the Cooked*, his first major work on mythology, he defended himself against the criticism that his interpretations of South American myth may tell more about the interpreter's thinking than about that of the Indians: "For, if the final goal of anthropology is to contribute to a better knowledge of objective thought and its mechanisms, it comes to the same thing in the end if, in this book, the thought of South American Indians takes shape under the action of mine, or mine under the action of theirs."

Here Lévi-Strauss assumes that it is possible to by-pass the

problems of social and cultural analysis that are central to anthropology and to tap directly into the panhuman mainstream of objective thought. He also avoids the problem of knowing what a correct interpretation is; for if the thought of the Indians has been misinterpreted, there is a sense in which their thought is not present at all in Lévi-Strauss's analysis. Is Greek thought really present in the desire to resolve a problem about origin from the earth? Do American Indians and others construct elaborate myth systems to encode messages about kin and *affine*, nature and culture? Some critics argue that these are Lévi-Strauss's preoccupations, not those of the myth-tellers. Alternatively, if (as some structuralists have claimed) there is no correct interpretation, then what of the claim that structuralism is scientific?



Lévi-Strauss's methods are not those of the natural sciences, and they neglect the ordinary methodological precautions of what he calls "the human sciences." In studying myth, for example, he presents some myths in paraphrase and uses partial versions of others. He does not pay much attention to how a myth was collected, by whom, from whom, what sort of a story it was supposed to be, and what sorts of reactions it usually elicited. In decoding it, he refers to whatever information he can glean about the natural environment of the myth-tellers, but he refers much less often to studies of their thought, their rituals, and their social arrangements. This enables him somehow to decode even the thoughts of people about whom very little is known at all, beyond a story or two that has been collected from them by travelers in passing.

Furthermore, his "demonstrations" and "proofs" have an inconvenient circularity. They depend on the acceptance of Lévi-Strauss's assumptions in the first place. In effect, he shows little concern for the verification of his hypotheses about other peoples and their thoughts. Indeed, he does not treat them as hypotheses at all. They are offered as suggestions and later assumed to be proved, when all that has been demonstrated is the coherence of the argument, not its correspondence to anything outside of itself.

Yet Lévi-Strauss insists on the scientific objectivity of his structuralism. It is because it is scientific, he argues, that the structuralist method enables us to uncover constants in human life and thought. The study of myths is a particularly good way of doing this because myths, he tells us, are not so much thought *up by* human beings as thought *in* human beings without their knowledge. If we understand myths, he adds, then we understand the mainstream of thought for which individual societies and individual people are only the temporary outlets. A structuralism that started by trying to discover the

essence of whole cultures and societies has now moved on to the direct investigation of human thought—not just the thought of a particular society, but the thought of humankind in general.

Many of Lévi-Strauss's critics feel that this should not be the major objective of the human sciences, and that we cannot in any case achieve it by Lévi-Strauss's methods. Nevertheless, it is possible to dissent from Lévi-Strauss's claims, to be skeptical of his theories, to disagree with him on specifics and still acknowledge that his readings of cultures and myths are both brilliant and original.



His approach is so rich in insight and new ideas that it has revolutionized the study of myth and symbolism, in and out of anthropology. It has had an enormous influence on literary criticism. Here at last was a method that claimed to enable its practitioners to break out of the endless cycle of subjectivity and to decode the thought behind the text, regardless of who its author was. Indeed, it launched a new academic vogue for the study of authorless texts.

At the same time, Perry Anderson, writing from a Marxist perspective in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983), credits Lévi-Strauss, and particularly *The Savage Mind*, with having almost single-handedly destroyed the hold of Marxism over French intellectuals. He notes that Lévi-Strauss's attack on Sartre's historicism and his refusal to accept the superiority of dialectical reasoning went unanswered. Instead, Louis Althusser incorporated Lévi-Strauss's antihistoricism into his own work, and soon other influential French thinkers—Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, and others—were taking structuralism, not Marxism, as their point of reference.

Yet structuralism came under heavy fire in Paris during the student upheavals of 1968. It was attacked by students and radicals for being indifferent to people as well as to history. Indeed, it was accused of treating the study of human beings almost as an exercise in literary criticism—an attitude more likely to appeal to professors than to students. To borrow Lévi-Strauss's phrase, structuralism was being excoriated as cold theory in a hot society, which also explains how it succeeded in reemerging, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the intellectual conflagration of 1968. French Marxism, in recent years, has been in political retreat. With French society trying to “cool it,” the times have seemed ripe for an impersonal theory that focuses on the constants in human affairs, turns its back on history, and appears to offer no recipe for political action. But Lévi-Straussian structuralism is by no means devoid of social implications.

Lévi-Strauss has shown, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that all human societies, not just those of the industrial nations, are capable of remarkable feats of speculative thought. This is in itself a revolution-

ary notion. It forces us to recognize that we in the West, despite a temporary scientific advantage, have no basis for claiming intellectual superiority over the rest of the world.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss has given us the most sophisticated refutation of evolutionary historicism—the naive faith in progress that informs the social theories of Marxists and liberals alike. We can no longer assume that our way of life represents the most advanced stage of progress, and that other societies have simply been less successful than ours in reaching it. Instead, we have to face the fact that societies develop different emphases, which in turn give them different destinies. Lévi-Strauss offers us a new vision of what it means to be human, and he challenges us to develop new ways of coming to terms with the differences between human societies. These are remarkable achievements, and they are not much diminished by the fact that his structuralism has not developed the *science* of society that it once promised us.

Yet if Lévi-Strauss has failed to establish a scientific method of comparative analysis (as I believe he has), he has more than made up for it with his imaginative brilliance. His attempt to look at cultures as though they were languages, and his effort to discover the universal structuring principles behind them, have influenced scholars in the humanities and social sciences throughout the world. New developments in semiotics (the study of signs and symbols), literary criticism, history, and even psychology have all been inspired by his work. Meanwhile philosophers argue with him but cannot ignore his influence. It seems, therefore, that although academic specialists may reject Lévi-Strauss's specific conclusions, they will be following up his leads for a long time to come.