

axel honneth

a structuralist rousseau: on the anthropology of claud lévi-strauss

There are scientific theories that guard their innermost impulse like a secret. The fundamental philosophical conviction from which their entire force is drawn is so inconspicuously smuggled into particular studies that from the outside it hardly can be recognized. As theoretical progress in the social sciences is largely driven by such theories, they are often exposed to the danger of fundamental misunderstandings. Since their decisive and fundamental idea never makes an explicit appearance, such theories are easily confused with their specific contributions. As the examples of Durkheim and Weber show, it is only the history of a theory's reception which gradually frees the basic philosophical thought according to which alone that theory can be appropriately understood. The anthropological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss illustrates the case of such a theory today. As widespread as is his name in the scientific community, there is a significant misunderstanding: that he dedicated his entire effort to constructing an anthropological science with the sole aim of analyzing structures of myths and forms of kinship. It is supposed that Lévi-Strauss introduced the methods of structuralist linguistics into ethnographic research because he wanted to give the latter discipline the character of an objective science. The primary intent of his theory is consequently taken to be the attempt to bring the study of archaic cultures to a higher

degree of scientific rigor than previously had been achieved. No interpretation could be more misleading.

It is, first of all, a romantic impulse that provides the deepest source of animation for Lévi-Strauss's work; he had anything but a positivistic confidence in the sciences. Not only the foundation of his ethnological approach as a whole, but its realization in particulars as well, are marked by the romantic conviction that in the modern world the organic connection of humans with nature has been painfully destroyed. Lévi-Strauss undertook his ethnological investigations to provide access, from the perspective of a modernity estranged from nature, to the cosmological world-view of archaic peoples. Since an unmediated return is no longer possible in this day and age, it is to be demonstrated by means of a contemporary science that humans as one life form among others are bound up in solidarity with the cycle of nature. Structuralism represents, for Lévi-Strauss, the science that can achieve this end. Thus, we find in his work the birth of social scientific structuralism emerging from the spirit of Rousseauian romanticism. Only from the perspective of this innermost motive can his writings be understood; only according to it can they be meaningfully examined.

I.

Lévi-Strauss produced his first major investigation in 1955 with his travel report, **Tristes Tropiques**,¹ which was an intellectual justification for his ethnological efforts. Among the many smaller studies that preceeded this one, few dealt with the question of the cultural role of ethnology as such. The author of this account was originally not an ethnologist. He received his training as a student of philosophy in the same intellectual climate of the 1920's and 1930's which Piaget, in looking back, could only describe with scorn and irritation.² France in those days was dominated by a philosophy, informed by Bergsonian vitalism and Husserlian phenomenology, that had renounced the empirical procedures of the natural sciences and remained self-referentially self-enclosed. Instead of engaging in a critical encounter with current scientific research, the self-appointed goal of this philosophy was to obtain meaningful statements concerning human beings solely by means of a pure description of acts of consciousness. For Piaget, as for Lévi-Strauss, this experience represented the beginning of a disappointment for which no amends could be made: "Philosophy was not," wrote Lévi-Strauss some thirty years later, and not without indignation, in **Tristes Tropiques**, "Maid and Apprentice of scientific research, but rather a kind of aesthetic contemplation by the consciousness of itself." This unproductive sterile self-sufficiency of philosophy provoked the

two young scientists to their preoccupation with empirical research, the one driven to biology and psychology, the other grasping for the "rescue plank" of ethnography.

Accident aided Lévi-Strauss in his choice. Through the mediation of Célestin Bouglés, he was offered a position as Professor of Sociology in São Paulo in 1934. He accepted the offer without hesitation, giving up his position as a secondary school teacher that, like so many French philosophers, he first held. Thus, he set out on the scientific path that he was never to leave.

As soon as he was established in Brazil as a university instructor, Lévi-Strauss made his first ethnographic excursion into the interior of the country. What he collected in experiences and impressions during the few months he was to spend there formed the emotional foundation of all of his future thinking. The Indian culture of the Mató Grosso to which his explorations led him was in a state of inner collapse. Western civilization had advanced with silent violence into the surviving aboriginal tribes, depriving them of the integrity of their cultural life and leaving intact only a few of the received habits of thinking. It is not difficult to imagine the full extent of the psychic turmoil that must have fallen upon this recent convert to ethnology as he realized the hopeless situation of the aboriginal culture he had intended to investigate. It required nearly twenty years before Lévi-Strauss could give literary expression to the feelings of shame, despair, guilt and sorrow that accompanied him on his first excursion. The result of this virtually poetic endeavor is **Tristes Tropiques**. It can be said without exaggeration to count as one of the greatest products of ethnological thinking in our century.

It is no accident that in its style and construction the book reminds us of the travel literature that emerged during the Enlightenment. Like Montesquieu in France and Forster in Germany, Lévi-Strauss combines careful detail in the descriptions of his journey with scientific observation on the way of life of the tribes he visited. The author of **Tristes Tropiques** shows the same loving meticulousness in recording cultural characteristics and the same circumspect care in describing personal encounters that dominates the classics of travel literature. The enormous richness of detail, exactness of observation and scientific circumspection have for him, above all, the task of clearly expressing the problem of which the experience of his first excursion made him permanently aware. If the lack of political concern of an entire generation of his predecessors spared them from confronting the question of what role ethnological research must take in the face of the continuing destruction of archaic cultures, it is precisely this question that comprises the center of Lévi-Strauss's book. In the answer to this question, which found

expression in constantly renewed reflections, we see the tumultuous and alarmed feelings of his ethnographic beginnings transformed into the *pathos* of the romantic.

It is anything but a so-called romantic yearning for the natural that leads Lévi-Strauss to his definition of ethnology. He distances himself from the naïve view that finds in the remains of archaic cultures a primordial state of human social existence. Conversely, he condemns with equal determination all evolutionary modes of thought that suppose the task of ethnological research is to assign the ways of life of archaic societies directly to a sequential scheme of social development. Both views are guilty of unexamined idealizations: the first naïvely idealized "the savage," the second, no less uncritically, the "mechanical civilization" of the present. Lévi-Strauss believes that views of this type do not acknowledge the fundamental responsibility that ethnology itself bears for the inexorable destruction of archaic cultures. Since ethnographic research always had served the interests of colonial rulers, it must now act as a "symbol of atonement" to make up for the crimes to which it contributed. The above-mentioned positions cannot carry out this additional task because their respective idealizations allow only the complementary and mutually reinforcing prejudices of European civilization to come into play; the problem thus arises as to how an appropriate understanding of ethnology is to be obtained. One of Rousseau's thoughts offers, for Lévi-Strauss, a way out of this difficulty. The significance of Rousseau for Lévi-Strauss's theory hardly can be overestimated. He again and again describes Rousseau as the "most ethnographical of all philosophers" and consistently calls him his "teacher," indeed, his "brother."³ In *Tristes Tropiques* he incorporates Rousseau's conception of a "state of nature" and twice cites the latter's noteworthy inclination,

...to separate the primordial from the artificial in the contemporary human nature and to grasp a state that no longer exists, that perhaps never existed and probably also never will exist, but of which we must nonetheless have correct ideas in order to be able to judge our contemporary situation.

Lévi-Strauss turned this sentence into a guiding methodological principle: the first corresponding task of ethnographic research is to increase our understanding of the "principle of the social life" to obtain a solely methodological notion of "the state of nature." The investigation of archaic societies makes it possible to study different solutions to common problems in the organization of social life, so that in accord with an increase in empirical information, the approximate picture of a "natural sociality" can be constructed. Only such a methodological construction of a

"state of nature" would offer us the possibility of "reforming our own customs and not those of other societies."

A second premise appears, however, and this alone makes it clear how an ethnology understood in this manner also could engender the moral strength required for atonement. Lévi-Strauss admittedly discloses a glimpse of the true romantic motive of the second presupposition only in a few places. They alone, however, give these methodological considerations their meaning. They alone lend a moral significance to his ethnology, and they also are indebted to Rousseau's thought. More is involved in the attentiveness that Lévi-Strauss shows to the cultures of surviving aboriginal tribes than a mere methodological interest. It is motivated by a profound respect for the beginnings of human socialization that itself is born of the deep romantic conviction that in archaic cultures one finds a specific capacity for an intimate integration within the wider life-network of nature. Thus, he speaks not infrequently of the "wisdom" and "spiritual harmony" of wild people. He also invokes the image of "an age in which the living world was not yet divided," because "affectionate familiarity between plants, animals and humans" ruled. As the counterpart to this image of intimacy with nature belongs a condemnation of our modern civilization which has as its characteristic development violent self-diremption out of the cycle of natural life. At no other place did Lévi-Strauss more clearly express this condemnation as in his celebrated lecture on Rousseau:

We started by cutting man off from nature and establishing him in an absolute reign. We believed ourselves to have thus erased his most unassailable characteristic: that he is first a living being. Remaining blind to this common property, we gave free rein to all excesses. Never better than after the last four centuries of his history could a Western man understand that, while assuming the right to impose a radical separation of humanity and animality, while granting to one all that he denied the other, he initiated a vicious circle. The one boundary, constantly pushed back, would be used to separate men from other men, and to claim—to the profit of ever smaller minorities—the privilege of a humanism, corrupted at birth by taking self-interest as its principle and its notion.⁴

This diagnostic observation upon the age first rounds out the picture of ethnology that Lévi-Strauss outlines in looking back upon his first excursions. Ethnography is justified as an empirical science of archaic cultures in light of the modern experience of estrangement from nature. To describe this modern condition, Lévi-Strauss has ready the typical romantic concepts of "disharmony," "imbalance," and "inauthenticity." Based upon the

hypothesis that the surviving cultures of archaic peoples represent examples of forms of social life intimately engaged with nature, ethnological research reconstructs, out of its empirical data, theoretical models of such "harmonious" societies. These societies then serve as mirrors in which a fragmented modernity could recognize its mistakes. In brief, the task of social anthropology "would consist, above all in gloomy times," in waking "a permanent possibility of humanity," that is embedded in the ways of thought and life of archaic societies.⁵ This social anthropology also acknowledges its moral task with the consciousness of its own guilt.

Lévi-Strauss gives yet another twist to this definition of the task of ethnology, a twist which determines the unique characteristic of his theory. It consists in the programmatic ideal that ethnological constructions should embody the comprehensive naturalism which marks the thought forms of archaic cultures. To a certain extent, through the selection of this theoretical means, ethnology must make itself into an element of that naturalistic world-view, the progressive destruction of which has led modern societies into their current state of painful fragmentation. Not only the subject of ethnological research, but also the methodological form of its investigations, is to be shaped by a constant, solitary concern with the comprehensive network of natural life. This bold thought permeates the entire width and breadth of Lévi-Strauss's work. It determined his first large-scale investigation into the rules of archaic kinship relations and enters into his research on totemism and finally his studies of the mythical worlds of aboriginal Indians. All of these are components of a program that is concerned with the apparently paradoxical justification of an expansion of humanism by means of structuralism.

II.

Lévi-Strauss's theoretical beginnings were formulated during a period in which French social science was completely dominated by the doctrines of Durkheim and his students. Lévi-Strauss wrested the basis for his first great study out of an exchange with this school of sociological thought. The work that propelled him to early fame within the scientific community was an investigation into the fundamental rules of archaic kinship relations.⁶ It was published in the 1940's, when Lévi-Strauss spent, after his departure from Brazil, first some time in New York and later, after returning to Paris, became the head of studies for ethnology at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. His larger investigation was preceded by a number of essays concerning the social organization of indigenous societies. These essays carried out

The ambitious goal of his study inconspicuously reflects the task that he had, in taking recourse to Rousseau, put to anthropology: the multiplicity of kinship forms that are found empirically in archaic cultures ought to be traced back to a few elementary patterns, so that as a result the theoretical model of a "natural" social order emerges. Lévi-Strauss obtains the means with which to make good this far-reaching claim by systematically generalizing Marcel Mauss's hypothesis concerning the social function of gift exchange. In his pioneering study, **The Gift**, Mauss, one of Durkheim's students, was pursuing the question of what role archaic rituals of exchange such as the North-Pacific *Potlatch* and the Melanesian *Kula* assume in the social life of their respective cultures. His answer, which proved extremely fruitful for all subsequent research, consisted in the hypothesis that such institutions of regulated giving and receiving of gifts served to maintain a constant flow of information between the different groups of a society. It is this idea of the communicative role of exchange that Lévi-Strauss uses to his advantage in the context of ethnological research into kinship. He takes up this idea in his understanding of the marriage rules of archaic cultures as obligations of exchange that apply to the exchange of women rather than to the circulation of goods.

This starting point presents a new interpretation of the incest taboo. The fact that in virtually all cultures sexual relations within the narrower family circle are strictly forbidden has always provoked explanations by the social sciences. The list of scientists who have devoted their attention to this phenomenon reaches from Spencer through Durkheim to Freud. Lévi-Strauss begins with a discussion of these different theoretical contributions. In contrast to interpretations that predominate today, which for the most part move within a psychoanalytic framework, he traces the universality of the incest taboo back to the functional meaning that it has assumed in the process of social integration. Its universal validity can be explained solely on the basis that family groups are urged indirectly toward constant interaction because sexual intercourse within the bounds of the family is prohibited. Given the form of a positive prescription, the incest taboo now constitutes the fundamental mechanism of all types of kinship formation. In the form of the rule of exogamy, the taboo stipulates that families must, in each case, relinquish women from their own ranks to other groups for marriage in order to receive women for marriage from them in return. In this way, the reciprocal exchange of women is shown to be the fundamental mechanism out of which the formation of kinship relations develops. As the institutional core of archaic societies,

it assures the reciprocal contact of social groups to an extent even greater than that of which the exchange of gifts is capable. In order to illustrate the different ways of building kinship relations, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between two forms of such an exchange of women. Whereas in the limited form of exchange the women are always directly exchanged between two groups, the generalized exchange takes place only indirectly among at least three participating groups. In this second case, the family group does not receive a woman in exchange from the same group to which they had relinquished one. Lévi-Strauss's conviction is that the complex kinship organizations are composed of elements from these two types of exchange of women. From them he thus attempts—more with the methods of a logician than with those of an ethnographer—to reconstruct the empirical diversity of archaic social organization.

Although among ethnologists the importance of this investigation was recognized shortly after its publication, the majority of them nonetheless registered considerable misgivings with regard to the study's basic theoretical presuppositions.⁷ The indirect equation of the incest taboo and rule of exogamy, upon which the argument was based, fell into doubt no less than the empirical hypothesis of a cross-cultural predominance of unilinear systems of descent. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss also was criticized for so unapologetically having dispensed with any speculations concerning an earlier matriarchal epoch, the scientific validity of which is contested even today. In the face of all this, the motives which had originally lead Lévi-Strauss were easily lost from sight. The theoretical goal of obtaining insight into the "principles of social life" by means of a constructive model was hidden behind the empirical constitution of his study. Not the exhaustive explanation of all empirical data, but rather the idealizing construction of a model on the basis of this data was the far-reaching demand that Lévi-Strauss had placed upon himself.

Measured in these terms, despite all justified criticism, his study achieved a decisive breakthrough. Lévi-Strauss discovered that the power of exchange to institute communication reached beyond the economic sphere into the organization of kinship relation. The reciprocal exchange between social groups thus could count as one of the media of social formation, toward the systematic investigation of which his theory was aimed. The fruitfulness of this discovery must have proved all the greater for Lévi-Strauss, since it offered encouragement to his romantic impulse. In the principle of reciprocity or mutuality, exchange contained a social power that proved to be not only the "raw material" of social life, but also, above and beyond that, was able to yield the affective basis of a solitary world-view that includes all life forms. Archaic societies, as was shown by the different

forms of exchange, are still clearly built upon social relations of reciprocity. Thus, in contrast to modern civilizations, in which the principle of reciprocity is overcome by technical and bureaucratic processes, archaic societies possess the greater possibility of being understood on the basis of solidarity. This thought is admittedly first encountered in Lévi-Strauss's investigation only in an embryonic form, but from this time on he keeps his attention focussed on this idea and will with every new book, give it even more exhaustive treatment. While in his study Lévi-Strauss succeeded in showing how the reciprocity embodied in exchange was a constitutive principle for all societies, he still had to address the question of what had, in turn, brought about this principle. The closing observations of his book offer a first answer to this problem.

Lévi-Strauss had learned enough from Durkheim to know that the functional analysis of a phenomenon cannot replace its causal explanation. It was precisely his attempt to explain causally the principle of reciprocity (which is constitutive for society as a whole), which lead him beyond Durkheim who was then the authority on the social prerequisites for the constitution of the categories of human knowledge. In this regard Durkheim had given Kant's epistemology, by reference to which he continually oriented himself, a sociological twist. In the last phase of his life, during which he composed his brilliant study, **The Elementary Forms of Religious Life**, the examination of situations of extraordinary collective experience seemed to provide the solution to his problem. The fundamental categories of human knowledge are supposed to be conceptual representations of experiences that a community is able to bring about by itself while in the affective states of a collective fusion or "effervescence." With this answer, admittedly, Durkheim gave his students just as many difficulties as new ideas. The work of Marcel Mauss likewise presented difficulties and insights. In it, Durkheim's formidable proposal was contrasted with a new theoretical position which Lévi-Strauss was to develop only a few decades later.⁸

Already in his report on "French Sociology" that appeared in 1945,⁹ Lévi-Strauss raised objections to Durkheim's work that henceforth founded his own position. The theoretical difficulties which Durkheim encounters when he relies upon collective emotional states as a final explanatory fact represent, for Lévi-Strauss, merely the expression of an inappropriate formulation of the problem. The symbolic achievements that the former seeks to explain sociologically simply cannot be traced back to social facts, because they first give rise to the social. Lévi-Strauss is convinced that the forms of symbolic thought represent a given datum that cannot be further explained sociologically. Instead, he

regards the intersubjectively binding character of shared symbols, through which a social order is constituted, to be embedded in pre-social facts, to which not sociology, but rather "modern psychology and linguistics" provide theoretical access. This pre-social area that he has in mind is defined programmatically as the "unconscious activity of the human mind." With this we are given the conceptual formula that from now on will provide the *leitmotif* for Lévi-Strauss's scientific work. The theoretical observations with which the investigation into the structures of kinship closes find in this theoretical formula a provisional answer to the question of the social prerequisites for human knowledge: the principle of reciprocity which is constitutive for all forms of kinship, it says, is generated by the fundamental structure of the human mind. With these early references to structuralist linguistics, Lévi-Strauss also reveals to us the instruments with which he believes he can analyze the unconscious activity of the human mind.

III.

The programmatic idea that it is the unconscious activity of the human mind that produces the symbolic order of society possessed, for Lévi-Strauss, more than merely social scientific implications. All hypostatizing language aside, this idea means first of all only that across the separations of culture and time there are a multiplicity of mental operations common to all humans. The structure of the human mind in this respect represents, as is said in the Rousseau essay, "a primordial connection" between "the self and the other." At the same time, since it is supposed to have an unconscious effect, Lévi-Strauss also sees in that operation of the mind an element of nature in humans. With them, natural processes that are withdrawn from all conscious control spill over into the human mode of life and allow it to be a part of a comprehensive totality. These two aspects invest the concept of the human mind in Lévi-Strauss's work with its subterranean emotive force. More than simply the conceptual means toward overcoming difficulties as in Durkheim's sociology, it should serve as the conceptual foundation for an expanded humanism, replacing the truncated modernity that has forgotten nature. Lévi-Strauss is not the only one who in those days linked such wide-ranging philosophical purposes with a universal conception of the human mind. At that time Jean Piaget also sought a way out of what must have seemed to be the sterility of contemporary philosophy via scientific analysis of the universal laws of the composition [*Aufbaugesetze*] of human knowledge. He also turned to a natural substratum in which the mental operations of humans are supposed to be anchored. It is thus the later determination of

those formal laws [*Formgesetze*] of human mental activity that lends their specific character to these approaches, which in the beginning were still quite comparable.¹⁰ Along Lévi-Strauss's scientific path, it was the discovery of structuralist linguistics that allowed him to state more precisely the general idea of a model and thus gave to his work its unmistakable feature.

His first encounter with structuralist linguistics occurred during the year which Lévi-Strauss spent in New York as a university instructor. Here, he made the acquaintance of Roman Jakobson, an exiled member of the Prague school of linguistics, who quickly made him familiar with the fundamentals of Saussure's linguistics. From the first moment, Lévi-Strauss was completely convinced that structuralist linguistics offered the theoretical method with which the structural laws of human mental activity further could be illuminated. It was admittedly also only vague notions that, from the fund of ideas handed down by that multifaceted school, he appropriated for his own purposes. Central from among them is the thought that a system of linguistic signs formed the basis of all linguistic utterances, in which system the individual elementary signs obtain their meaning solely from reciprocal relations of difference. Lévi-Strauss transfers this structuralist premise to his universal concept of the human mind. From this it follows that the unconscious thought operations of human beings consist in conferring meaning, through the formation of oppositions, upon any element of a given order.

This basic insight only gradually assumes clear contours in Lévi-Strauss's work. The first essays to try to make this new idea fruitful within ethnology were published during the early years of the 1950's. They still move within the thematic framework that was initiated with the studies of the social organization of archaic societies.¹¹ Within this formulation of the problem, it is not easy to make a direct use of the idea that the meaning of symbolic constructs comes from the unconscious production of symbolic oppositions. Nonetheless, for Lévi-Strauss such a connection results when he draws parallels between the role of the exchange of women in kinship formation and that of the exchange of words in communication. The implausible assumptions upon which such a comparison must rest, however, were soon and convincingly identified by critics.¹² In the work of the ethnographer, to the extent that he shifts his interest from research into kinship to the study of archaic forms of thought, these first and still immature attempts lose their worth [*Stellenwert*].

The practical obstacles that originally may have stood in the way of a fruitful utilization of the new idea disappear from the moment in which Lévi-Strauss makes the symbolic constructs directly into

the object of investigation. He described this transformation in his approach in the 1950's, as a theoretical transition from the "order of life" to the "order of thought," in which the unconscious thought operations of human beings come to light.¹³ By such an "order of thought," Lévi-Strauss has in mind all forms of religious and mythical thought. The cognitive structures that lie at the basis of such formations of social life henceforth constitute the primary interest of his theoretical work. A critical engagement with conventional interpretations of totemism represents his entry into this new field of research.¹⁴ In contrast with predominant interpretations, which trace the totemic practices of primitive peoples back to a magical belief in supernatural powers, Lévi-Strauss tries to show that, in this practice, a form of thought typical of all archaic cultures revives a particular application. He accounts for the specific circumstances which determine this application with the help of sociological arguments that result from an extension of his analysis of forms of kinship. Due to the constant exchange of various goods, the communicative relations among archaic societies constantly threaten to intensify the extent to which the social groups come into danger of losing their own identities. Thus, there emerges a need for the social counter-movement of a symbolic "distinction" between the interacting groups. These practices, which he called "totemic," offer the opportunity for this distinction insofar as they allow the social groups to ritually utilize the given concrete objects of their natural environment as signs of their respective identities. Consequently, the special purpose of all totemic practices consists, for Lévi-Strauss, in the maintenance of group-specific identities. In the cognitive techniques at work in the formation of correspondences between natural and social phenomena, he sees again the general characteristic that distinguishes the thought forms of archaic cultures in general from those of modern civilization.

The study, **The Savage Mind**, published in 1962, assembled the evidence for this formidable thesis.¹⁵ In none of his other books did Lévi-Strauss more freely allow his complete romantic admiration for the cultural achievements of archaic societies to come to the fore. This shows itself particularly in the fundamental claim that archaic thought is not to be understood merely as a preliminary stage of, but rather, as an alternate form of the scientific world-view. In presenting evidence for this thesis, Lévi-Strauss gradually uncovers the cognitive operation upon which the special case of totemic classification has already shed light. The "wild" thinking of archaic groups, as it is called in contrast to the "domesticated" mode of thought of developed societies, fixes concretely upon sensibly perceivable phenomena, assigns them to one another through the formation of contrasts and analogies, and thus finally produces a comprehensive network of vivid

sensible correspondences. Lévi-Strauss is aware that such an analogical form of thinking is inferior when contrasted to the instrumental reasoning of modern scientific thinking. But, conversely, it is not the unrestrained and fruitful utilization of sensible properties that leads him to understand this classificatory thought as an alternative to scientific world-views. What fascinates him above all is the solitary, indeed, virtually loving attention paid to the natural environment which stands as a constitutive condition of that form of knowledge. It is again with Rousseau's intellectual help that Lévi-Strauss describes this sensibility of archaic thinking. Therein lies the feeling of a "primordial accord" in which "Rousseau had deeply understood the condition of solidarity of that thought and that society." This same connection is yet more clearly described in his essay on Rousseau:

This faculty—Rousseau did not neglect to repeat—is compassion, deriving from the identification with another who is not only a parent, a relative, a compatriot, but any man whatsoever, seeing that he is a man, and much more: any living being, seeing that it is living... The total apprehension of men and of animals as sensitive beings (in which identification consists) precedes the awareness of oppositions—oppositions first between common characteristics, and only later between human and nonhuman.

Certainly it is not incorrect, then, to suppose that the secret center, indeed, perhaps even the long sought result of Lévi-Strauss's scientific endeavors lies in these findings. A feeling of solidarity and primordial accord with every natural life form (bearing an inner kinship with Adorno's doctrine of *mimesis*,¹⁶) is therewith proposed as the fundamental "principle" of all social life. If such feelings of comprehensive solidarity with nature are still empirically to be found in archaic cultures, it is because there they are immediately and concretely contained not only in the rules of social life, but also in the forms of classificatory thought. These feelings virtually are buried by technical rules of procedure in the mechanistic civilization of modernity. Only with "people of the circus and employees of zoological gardens," as it is poignantly put in **The Savage Mind**, are remains of such intimate forms of knowing nature to be found. In the face of this civilized condition, it is to ethnology that the task falls of reminding us, through empirically oriented investigations, about the integration of all social life with the natural world so as to scientifically found a naturalistically corrected humanism. Thus, it is not surprising that an ecological ethic is to be found in Lévi-Strauss's more recent publications, and further, that he develops initial suggestions for a concept of human freedom that is expanded by the inclusion of relations to nature.¹⁷

However, in the extent to which this philosophical core of his work is gradually disclosed, and to which admiration of the inner rigor of the romantic vision grows, must also be added theoretical doubt about whether the scope of such an undertaking is meaningfully attained through the simple appropriation of structuralist concepts. Structuralist linguistics offers Lévi-Strauss a method by means of which he can achieve surprising accord within the field of comparative mythology. This method consists of a formal parsing of myths into pregnant complexes of meaning. But he must accept along with this not only a problematic infiltration [*Unterwanderung*] of all hermeneutic problems of interpretation, but also the exclusion of questions such as those concerning the inner motivation of mythical texts—precisely those questions concerning which his romantic expectation would have to demand an answer. To be sure, the structuralist version of his conception of the human mind allows him to judge the classificatory arts of archaic cultures to be a still free, even a “wild” expression of the binary [*oppositionsetzende*] thought activity of human beings. But, with the cognitivist dilution of Durkheim’s sociology, he simultaneously relinquishes all possibilities of accounting for the affective basis of archaic thought, to which precisely his attention was lead by his romantic interests.¹⁸ And finally, the most fruitful discovery of his kinship studies, the insight into the extra-economic role of exchange, was actually obstructed more than expanded by the structuralist jargon. All these things considered, the concluding impression forces us to see that the structuralist equipment of the theory fails to carry through the imposing course set by its author. The romantic impulse that permeates Lévi-Strauss’s work down to every nook and cranny cannot find adequate expression in the theoretical language of structuralism.¹⁹

Having reached this critical point in the discussion, one last background motive for Lévi-Strauss’s use of structuralism comes into view. It consists in the intention gradually to divest the structuralist interpretive procedure of its scientific character and to turn it into a form of analogizing thinking. Lévi-Strauss gave indications of this in comments upon his projected four-volume study of Indian myths. It is as if the author had finally dispensed with the indirect scientific demonstration of the natural framework of all social life and had, with the help of structuralist procedures, taken flight directly into the writing of a new myth. In this case, then, his romantically inspired ethnology would in the end have rid itself of every theoretical claim in order to transpose itself in one fell swoop into a cosmological world-view.

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **Tristes Tropiques**, John and Doreen Weightman, trans., (New York: Washington Square Press, 1977).
2. See Jean Piaget, **Insights and Illusions of Philosophy**, 1st Am. ed., Wolfe Mays, trans., (New York: World Publishing Co., 1971).
3. See Hanns Henning Ritter, "Claude Lévi-Strauss als Leser Rousseaus," in Wolf Lepenies & Hanns Henning Ritter, eds., **Orte des Wilden Denkens**, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).
4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man," in **Structural Anthropology**, Vol. 2, Monique Layton, trans., (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," in **Structural Anthropology**, Vol. 2.
6. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **The Elementary Structures of Kinship**, James Harle Bell & John Richard von Sturmer, trans., Rodney Needham, trans. & ed., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
7. See Edmund Leach, **Claude Lévi-Strauss**, revised edition, (New York: Viking Press, 1974).
8. Henning Ritter, "Die ethnologische Wende. Über Marcel Mauss," **Neue Rundschau** 3 (1981).
9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "French Sociology," in G. Gurwitsch and E. Moore, eds., **Twentieth Century Sociology**, (New York, 1945).
10. See Howard Gardner, **The Quest for Mind. Piaget, Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement**, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
11. See the first essays in: Claude Lévi-Strauss, **Structural Anthropology**.
12. See the summary by Simon Clarke, **The Foundations of Structuralism. A Critique of Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement**, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1981).
13. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Place of Social Anthropology in the Social Sciences," in **Structural Anthropology**, Vol. 1.
14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **Totemism**, Rodney Needham, trans., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).
15. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **The Savage Mind**, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

16. See Johann P. Arnason, **Zwischen Natur und Gesellschaft**, (Frankfurt: EVA, 1976).
17. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Reflections on Liberty," in **The View from Afar**, Joachim Neugroschel & Phoebe Hoss, trans., (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
18. See the discussions in Claude Lévi-Strauss, **Myth and Meaning**, (New York: Schocken Books, 1979); additionally see Alain Caillé, "D'un éthnocentrisme paradoxal," in **MAUSS** 16 (1985).
19. See Clifford Geertz, "The Cerebral Savage," in **Encounter** 4 (1967).