

History of the Human Sciences

<http://hhs.sagepub.com>

Anthropology and the sciences humaines: the voice of Levi-Strauss

Christopher Johnson

History of the Human Sciences 1997; 10; 122

DOI: 10.1177/095269519701000309

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://hhs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/10/3/122>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *History of the Human Sciences* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://hhs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://hhs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Anthropology and the *sciences humaines*: the voice of Lévi-Strauss

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON

ABSTRACT

The programme Lévi-Strauss set for anthropology in the postwar years places his discipline at the centre of the human sciences in France. As a *structural* anthropology it aspires to the theoretical rigour of science, but it is also regarded by many as a new humanism with a wider conception of humanity. In marked contrast to the dramatized subject of existentialism, the subject of this science – like the individual Lévi-Strauss – is an effaced and self-effacing one. Despite this general elision of individual voice, there emerges in *Tristes tropiques* a ‘totemic’ self constructed on the premise of a ‘neolithic’ affinity with the traditional societies studied by the ethnologist. The neolithic metaphor not only allows Lévi-Strauss to explain the profound necessity of his vocation, it also forms part of a complex of concepts and values basic to his thought. To this extent the metaphor is an overdetermined one, objectively unacceptable but subjectively necessary for the construction of a coherent mythology of the ethnographic vocation. It is both a translation of the individual voice of Lévi-Strauss and part of a more general paradigm of the prehistoric utopia.

Key words human sciences in France, mythology of the ethnographic vocation, neolithic metaphor, new humanism, paradigm of the prehistoric utopia

The role played by Lévi-Strauss in the emergence and constitution of the *sciences humaines* in postwar France is an important one. His contribution is

first to anthropology, which in France had developed relatively late in relation to other western countries, and which as a discipline had only marginal representation in the university system. In the 1930s he was part of the first generation of French anthropologists to undertake fieldwork, and from the late 1940s onwards contributed significantly to the theorization of what had hitherto been a distinctly under-theorized discipline. Parallel to this process of professionalization, and resulting from it, was the increasing institutional prominence of anthropology, symbolized in 1959 with the election of Lévi-Strauss to the Collège de France. Increasingly during this period, it seems, Lévi-Strauss becomes the *voice* of French anthropology. Not only does he endeavour to ensure the theoretical foundations of the discipline, but he also pronounces on the more general questions of its scope, its object and its aims. His capacity for overview and synthesis, a typical feature of this kind of paradigm construction, is not, however, restricted to his own discipline. In the postwar context anthropology also has to reckon with a number of proximate and to an extent competing disciplines – sociology, history, philosophy – so that the space of the human sciences in France during this period is to say the least a contested one. Despite the relative institutional marginality of anthropology, even following its consecration at the Collège de France, one could say that its voice, and especially the voice of Lévi-Strauss, possessed a force greater than its actual (institutional) mass. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss is not content to claim for the discipline of anthropology a legitimate place among the human sciences; more than this, he places anthropology at the very centre of the human sciences. This is because the structural anthropology he proposes combines what seems to be essential to the concept of ‘human science’. First, in its object of study anthropology, unlike its close relative, social science, is concerned with the entire range of human experience and not simply its culture-specific manifestation in a particular society. Second, structural anthropology is a science to the extent that beneath the diversity of human experience it discerns invariant structures that are common to all societies.

Despite the rigorously scientific programme Lévi-Strauss delineated for the discipline in his early texts, nevertheless in the 1950s anthropology began to be considered by many as new humanism. In effect, the old humanism, as exemplified in the figure of Sartre, seemed by comparison parochial both in its confinement to a specific tradition of western philosophy and in its lack of interest in the developments of contemporary science. The new humanism of ethnology, and especially of its Lévi-Straussian variant, structural anthropology, was seen to combine the rigour of science with an enlarged vision of humanity, acting as both the conscience and the consciousness of western civilization. It also assigned a humbler role to the individual subject. With Sartre, it could be said that the author is always present as existential subject and as moral agent, that it is impossible to dissociate ‘life’ and ‘work’. With Lévi-Strauss, by contrast, and in accordance with the natural-scientific ideal

of objective detachment, the concepts and models of which he is author are deemed to possess a truth and universality independent of their instance of enunciation, so that the author himself is in a sense contingent to their realization. What is intriguing is that Lévi-Strauss goes a step further than the conventional scientific separation of subject and object and presents us with a subject that is already abstracted, a voice that in a sense is already absent. One of the few properly autobiographical details concerning the individual named Lévi-Strauss is precisely his self-confessed lack of a normal sense of individual identity and personality.¹ This effacement or self-effacement is not, as it might appear, simply a manoeuvre to protect and preserve a certain everyday privacy; rather, it seems in Lévi-Strauss's case to be a genuine aspect of personal temperament. Structurally (and the opposition is not an arbitrary one) it could be viewed as the binary opposite of the hyperconscious self-apprehension characteristic of the Sartrean subject. Without wishing to reduce such an overdetermined context to purely biographical factors, it could be said that the polarization that developed between existentialism and structuralism and their figureheads, Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, depended at least in part on this simple difference of temperament.

To continue on the subject of humanism and human science: if for the reasons given above anthropology is viewed by Lévi-Strauss as the human science *par excellence*, it is at the same time separate and distinct from the other human sciences in one important respect, and this is in the primary and intensely individual experience of fieldwork. Preliminary to the work of synthesis and theorization that constitutes anthropology as a science, there is the compulsory passage – one could say the rite of passage – through a cultural space in most cases radically different from our own. This first moment is on the one hand a necessary stage in the construction of anthropological knowledge, providing the discipline with an independent empirical base. On the other hand, and regardless of its specific content, Lévi-Strauss believes fieldwork to be an essential and irreplaceable psychological experience, which transforms the individual's perception of self and other. It is only if the individual undergoes such a psychological conversion that he or she will be able subsequently to practise the discipline with any degree of success. It is only through such immersion, literally body and soul, in the defamiliarizing environment of an alien culture, that the ethnologist is able to acquire the intuitive 'feel' necessary for the proper interpretation of anthropological data.²

Whether it be a question of the empirical-scientific dimension of fieldwork, the somewhat routine activity of ethnographic data collection, or the more radical spiritual and intellectual conversion described above, one could ask what happens to the voice of the individual Lévi-Strauss between the two instances that come to constitute the human science of anthropology – the primary instance of experience, the *passion* of fieldwork and its subsequent

sublation in structural anthropology. There is in fact a very definite site of the passage between the two instances in Lévi-Strauss's work: the autobiographical narrative of *Tristes tropiques*.³ In this book one reads both an account of ethnographic experience and an overcoming of the essential irreducibility of that experience. The chapters of the final section of the book (appropriately entitled 'The Return') establish the philosophical distance that finally makes possible the abstraction of structural analysis. In these chapters there is a gradual detachment from the *complication* of the ethnographic experience, with its uncertain, sometimes traumatic, confrontation of western subject and 'exotic' other: theory can now begin.

The question is, then, does the transvaluation that occurs in the final pages of *Tristes tropiques* wholly subsume the singular experience of the individual Lévi-Strauss? Does there remain any trace of the voice of Lévi-Strauss in the passage from fieldwork to theory? It should first be said that, true to the self-characterization noted earlier, the *subject* Lévi-Strauss is already a singularly elusive presence in the book. In this sense *Tristes tropiques* is not a work of autobiography as such. Indeed, the effacement of individual voice is such that the book would perhaps more accurately be viewed as a case history, a paradigm of the ethnographic vocation, than as an exercise in self-disclosure. The explanation Lévi-Strauss gives of how he came to ethnography is notable for its *impersonality*, his choice of vocation being described almost entirely in terms of structural and sociological factors. The 'choice', if such a term may be used, is a negative rather than a positive one, reached through a series of differentiations and exclusions. In 1928 he is preparing his degree in two subjects, law and philosophy. In those times, he says, students in the first year of *la licence* belonged to two distinct 'species' or 'races', on the one hand those preparing for medicine and law, on the other those studying arts and science subjects. Members of the first group are aggressive and extrovert in character and already confident of their future role and position in society; their political orientation is towards the far right. By contrast, members of the second group are introverted, usually destined for teaching or research, and live in a kind of extended childhood. Their marginality and detachment from society can be interpreted either as a retreat or as a kind of mission. Politically, their sympathies are normally to the left (65–6; 57). According to this sociological explanation of different classes or types of individual, the young Lévi-Strauss studying both law and philosophy would logically have been a member of both groups, though temperamentally he is obviously a member of the second group, that of the socially semi-detached intellectual or scientist. This explains his subsequent gravitation towards philosophy, which he confesses was motivated less by a real passion for the subject than by the repulsion he felt for other subjects. In fact, he is highly critical of philosophy as it was taught in the 1930s, deploring its abstract verbalism, its historicism and its confusion of rhetorical sophistication with true knowledge (61–3;

52–4).⁴ But apart from this intellectual reservation, there are more personal reasons for his final abandonment of philosophy: following the *agrégation*, and at the end of a year spent in secondary education, he finds it impossible to repeat the same programme of teaching. This is because of his peculiar inability, as he describes it, to focus his attention on the same object twice. In view of this seemingly congenital resistance to repetition, and confronted with the prospect of teaching the same thing for the rest of his life, ethnology appears as an attractive escape route, a means of avoiding repetition (63–4; 54–5).

On one level, therefore, Lévi-Strauss provides a lucid analysis of the situational and psychological factors determining his choice of vocation. Ethnology appears as the logical end-point of a process of selection and elimination of binary alternatives at each stage: law–philosophy; philosophy–ethnology. Again, what is striking about this process is the distance and impersonality of its narration. One has the impression that the protagonist is merely the passive site of his experiences and that his ‘choices’ are reactions to structural determinants more than results of a genuine vocation. As he admits, the migration from philosophy to ethnology was a common occurrence amongst his contemporaries (68; 58), and even the temperamental bias which places him in the camp of the left-wing, socially detached intellectual is depicted as the generic trait of a specific social group. Lévi-Strauss’s ostensibly autobiographical account seems therefore to be constantly working against conventional individuation. In fact, if there is anywhere a residue of the individual voice in this account, it is in the bizarre infirmity which cuts short his teaching career, that is, his mental incapacity for repetition.

However, at the same time and on another level, parallel to the explanation of the contextual and conjunctural factors determining his choice of vocation, Lévi-Strauss gives another explanation, what could be described as a more essentialist explanation, which provides retrospective and positive validation to what after all has been a negative choice, an option that remains after all others have been eliminated. Following the relation of his unfortunate experience of secondary teaching, he hazards:

Today I sometimes wonder if anthropology did not attract me, without my realizing this, because of a structural affinity between the civilizations it studies and my particular way of thinking. I have no aptitude for prudently cultivating a given field and gathering in the harvest year after year: I have a neolithic kind of intelligence. Like native bush fires, it sometimes sets unexplored areas alight; it may fertilize them and snatch a few crops from them, and then it moves on, leaving scorched earth in its wake. At the time, however, I was incapable of achieving any awareness of this deeper motivation. I knew nothing about anthropology, I had

never attended any course and when Sir James Frazer paid his last visit to the Sorbonne to give a memorable lecture – in 1928, I think – it never occurred to me to attend, although I knew about it. (64; 55)

There are many things that might be said about this surprising passage, but I will restrict myself to the following remarks. First, up to this point I have been referring, with certain qualifications, to Lévi-Strauss's 'choice' of vocation, but according to the etymology of the word, and according to a well-established tradition of autobiography, one does not choose a vocation, the vocation chooses you, or rather *calls* you. It is the voice of this calling that is described here, the voice of ethnography which calls the individual Lévi-Strauss. Second, and again following a well-defined tradition of autobiography, there is the notion of the unconscious nature of the calling: at the time he was unaware of its underlying necessity, its deeper cause. A few pages later, he reiterates this notion of unconscious determination in a comparison with mathematics and music, two other disciplines which can be practised intuitively, without tuition: 'Like mathematics or music, [ethnography] is one of the few genuine vocations. One can discover it in oneself, even though one may have been taught nothing about it' (67; 57). Finally – and this is what is most surprising about the passage – the deep-level determination of this vocation is attributed to a structural affinity, an elective affinity between the individual Lévi-Strauss's mind and the cultures he as an ethnologist studies. This is something more than the sense of sympathy and solidarity an anthropologist might acquire for his or her subjects during the experience of fieldwork, for example. It is rather, as Lévi-Strauss describes it, a kind of transcendent harmony or consonance preceding any empirical contact with the other culture. The content or specification of this affinity is significant: like so-called 'neolithic' cultures, semi-nomadic groups using slash-and-burn techniques, he is unable wisely to exploit a fixed terrain from year to year.

Of course, this comparison, which Lévi-Strauss is using to describe his profound resistance to (his horror of) repetition, could be taken as simply a metaphor, as an aspect and example of the literary register of *Tristes tropiques*, which is an autobiography and not an academic work of anthropology. The dramatization and essentialization of vocation it implies would equally be part of autobiographical convention, a familiar device of self-construction. The problems with this interpretation are clear. Notwithstanding the generic ambiguity of *Tristes tropiques*, and in spite of the literary quality of much of the narrative, one would expect an ethnologist concerned with the relativity of cultural forms and the universality of their structures to be at least reflexively conscious of the structure he is describing in this instance. It is as if having demonstrated, along the horizontal, relational axis of context and conjuncture the external (structural) components of his choice of specialization, he feels compelled to motivate that choice at a deeper level of determination,

along the vertical axis of the elective affinity. What is relative and contingent at the level of context and conjuncture becomes necessary and essential at the level of this peculiar affinity. One could compare this with the explanation of social individuation given in two later works, *Totemism* and *The Savage Mind*, where the individual is the point of intersection of a number of different levels of social classification, the most individualized being that of the personal totem. The metaphor of the neolithic would therefore be something like Lévi-Strauss's personal totem. He belongs, differentially, to one or another social category, 'race' or 'species', but the ultimate and irreducible level of categorization is that of the mental affinity which binds him, necessarily, to the 'neolithic' other.

If it is difficult to know what to make of this metaphor, whether or not one should take it seriously, a second response to the question of its status would be that, taken in the wider context of *Tristes tropiques* and of other contemporary texts, it is something more than a metaphor. The unconscious voice that calls Lévi-Strauss to ethnology is in fact strangely overdetermined, and the metaphor of the neolithic, it transpires, is neither innocent nor arbitrary; metonymically, it is part of a conceptual complex extending beyond the peculiar case of the present example. The category of the neolithic itself of course originates in archaeology, a human science distinct from, but having a history of close collaboration with, anthropology. Dating from the mid-19th century, the term is normally used to designate the most recent period of the Stone Age, associated with the beginnings of agriculture, pottery and sedentism. In the 20th century, the Marxist archaeologist Gordon Childe created the term 'neolithic revolution' – by analogy with the so-called industrial revolution – to describe what he viewed as humankind's decisive and irreversible transition from hunting and gathering to the practices of agriculture and cattle-breeding.⁵ In Lévi-Strauss's work, the neolithic assumes a value over and above its more specialized use in archaeology. For example, in *Race and History*, the neolithic revolution is described as being of equal importance to the industrial-scientific revolution of the past two or three centuries, the argument being that the latter represents only a fractional moment in the total history of human culture, and that it exploits a 'capital' of accumulated knowledge of which a significant part belongs to the neolithic period.⁶ The effect of this adjusted perspective is to relativize the achievements of modern technological culture and to valorize its prehistory, especially as manifested in neolithic culture.

Lévi-Strauss's valorization of the neolithic is continued and further accentuated in *Tristes tropiques* itself. Following his description of the crisis of faith experienced in the final stages of his fieldwork,⁷ he works in the closing chapters of the book to rescue his discipline from the radical doubt that continues to threaten it, even at the time of writing. Part of his lengthy and sometimes convoluted recuperation of anthropology is to argue for its moral mission as

mediator of cultural difference in a world subject to the homogenizing influence of western technological civilization. This critique of 'mechanical civilization', as he terms it, is not an idealistic call for a return to the state of nature, no more than Rousseau's *Second Discourse* was an idealization of 'natural' humanity. The question, he says, is not whether it is possible to discover a hypothetical state of nature but rather (the social state being an irreducible component of the human) to look for what might be the essential basis of human society, before the complications and corruptions of 'civilized' existence. It would be useful to quote in full Lévi-Strauss's argument for the relevance of ethnographic research, as it is here that the category of the neolithic is reintroduced, with certain, specific effects:

To this quest, [ethnographic] comparison can contribute in two ways. It shows that the basis is not to be discovered in our civilization: of all known societies ours is no doubt the one most remote from it. At the same time, by bringing out the characteristics common to the majority of human societies, it helps us to postulate a type, of which no society is a faithful realization, but which indicates the direction the investigation ought to follow. Rousseau thought that the way of life now known as neolithic offered the nearest approach to an experimental representation of the type. One may, or may not, agree with him. I am rather inclined to believe he was right. By neolithic times, man had already made most of the inventions necessary for his safety. We have already seen why writing can be excluded; to say that it is a double edged weapon is not a sign of primitivism. . . . In the neolithic period, man knew how to protect himself from cold and hunger; he had achieved leisure in which to think. . . . In that mythic age, man was no freer than he is today; but only his humanness made him a slave. Since his control over nature remained very limited, he was protected – and to some extent released from bondage – by a cushioning of dreams. (512; 468)

It can be seen that the ethnography described here is not simply a neutral mediator of cultural diversity, it is more precisely a *structural* anthropology, to the extent that its aim is the construction of a model resuming the (authentic) traits fundamental to all societies. The Rousseau of the *Second Discourse* is in this sense a model-builder, describing a hypothetical stage of human development intermediate between the state of nature and the social state, approximate but not equivalent to that of 'primitive' societies in his own century. With the benefit of 20th-century archaeological science, Lévi-Strauss thinks it is possible to assimilate this stage with the neolithic period. Again, of course, the problem is that while in archaeology the neolithic is a more or less neutral category, it clearly takes on a value over and above its descriptive content when transposed into the terms of Lévi-Straussian anthropology. It

is used to make the qualitative and unverifiable assertion that a specific degree of cultural development is *sufficient* to humanity's needs. It is seen to exclude the technology of writing, which in an earlier part of the book Lévi-Strauss had considered to be so inimical to authentic human freedom.⁸ Finally, its limitations compared with modern technological culture are claimed to be compensated by the insulation it provides against the alienation of an objective knowledge of the world; if a slave to nature, the neolithic individual nevertheless has the leisure to think and to dream. The positive value Lévi-Strauss ascribes to the neolithic therefore links it with a network of themes basic to his work: the critique of modern western civilization; the scientific and humanistic contribution of Rousseau, predecessor of modern anthropology; the relative autonomy of 'savage' thought in so-called non-literate cultures (we are close here to the 'surplus' of signification described in the *Introduction to Mauss* and the non-utilitarian thought of *The Savage Mind*).

If the neolithic is the nexus of a conceptual and value system which is fundamental to Lévi-Strauss's thought, we should remember that it is also, metaphorically, an attribute of his own mind. Putting these two sides of the neolithic equation together, the resulting complex poses some difficult questions as to the exact status of the anthropology Lévi-Strauss constructs in his early texts. On the one hand, as has been seen, anthropology as human *science* implies the relative autonomy of its conceptual constructs from the voice that formulates them. Within this project, the aim of structural anthropology is to arrive at structures so general as to be common to all societies, absolute to the extent that they are universal categories of the human mind. The subject of the human science of structural anthropology is therefore *indifferent*, the voice that speaks this science should, in principle at least, be the voice of any subject. On the other hand, such abstraction is clearly impossible, and not simply because we are dealing with a *human* science, a science in which the observer is irreducibly part of the object observed. In the case of Lévi-Strauss, the residual element of subjectivity with which one inevitably has to reckon is not simply this or that aspect of the character and experience of the empirical individual 'Lévi-Strauss'. As we have discovered, this individual is a singularly elusive one, tending towards self-effacement rather than autobiographical disclosure. However, parallel to this reduction of 'self' in the conventional (western) sense of the term is the equally insistent construction of a 'totemic' self ensuring the comprehension of exotic thought at a level still deeper than that of the human mind. It is as if for Lévi-Strauss the hypothesis of human mind does not entirely explain the possibility of such comprehension, requiring a specific substantive content (the metaphor of the neolithic) in addition to the notion of structural similarity. In principle, comprehension should be a possibility for any individual of any culture, like Meno's nameless slave recapitulating Pythagoras's theorem; in practice, such anamnesis requires the guidance of a Socrates.

Of course, from an external viewpoint, Lévi-Strauss's essentialization of the vocation of ethnology and, within this, his speculation of an elective (neolithic) affinity with non-western cultures, are objectively unacceptable. The social and human sciences work precisely to demystify such essentialization by demonstrating its contextual and conjunctural determinations. As we have seen, one side of Lévi-Strauss's account of his choice of vocation provides such analysis, but this relativistic description is at the same time accompanied by affirmation of the absolute nature of his calling. Equally unacceptable is his mediation of the category of the neolithic. It is first not at all certain whether his use of the category does not fall prey to what he elsewhere criticizes as the 'archaic illusion', even if, unlike cultural evolutionists, he attributes a positive value to this prehistoric stage of human development.⁹ Second, even if one accepts Lévi-Strauss's characterization of the neolithic, his proposition of a structural affinity between his mind and the indigenous cultures he studies cannot be treated as anything other than metaphor; as a proposition it is even less verifiable than the postulate of a universal human mind.

From an internal point of view, on the other hand – the point of view of Lévi-Strauss's theoretical constructions and his self-construction in relation to them – what could be termed the neolithic complex has perfect coherence. As has been noted, it brings together a number of key concepts of his work, while at the same time providing a deep-level motivation for his choice of discipline. The cultures studied by the ethnologist are, according to Lévi-Strauss's definition, non-literate cultures, cultures not without a history but which process history in a way different from that of the 'cumulative' societies in the modern world. Their refusal or reduction of the event is mirrored in his own constitutional inability to accumulate and capitalize upon past experience and in his limited sense of selfhood.¹⁰ While from an external viewpoint this metaphorical association can be contested, its internal coherence is precisely analogous to the coherence Lévi-Strauss attributes to the 'untamed' thought of traditional societies: it may not provide an exact description of the world, but it does provide a total explanation of a particular universe.

Such is the voice that comes to speak in the name of French anthropology. If the programme Lévi-Strauss delineates for the discipline in his early texts is by no means uniformly adopted by his contemporaries; if structural analysis itself seems finally to become more Lévi-Strauss's personal idiolect than the shared language of a human scientific community, nevertheless the performative effect of his totemic identification with the Other is to lend a certain *authenticity* to the endeavour of anthropology, a moral siting point for the individual practising this most relativistic of the human sciences. Ironically perhaps, the personal totem of the neolithic, which could be said to constitute the individual signature of the voice of Lévi-Strauss, itself becomes a kind of paradigm, as can be seen in the confession of another Americanist, Alfred Métraux, in an interview given shortly before his death in 1963:

I also think that my contact with primitive cultures made me aware that the protestation which precisely had driven me towards cultures so different from our own was based on a kind of nostalgia, a nostalgia which we Westerners have, I think, always experienced and which I call . . . the nostalgia for the neolithic. Without wishing to lapse into a simplistic type of Rousseauism, it seems to me that humanity was perhaps wrong to progress beyond the stage of the neolithic.

You'll doubtless ask me: why the neolithic, why not the palaeolithic, why not the Bronze Age or the Iron Age? Well, if I've chosen the neolithic and not, for example, the palaeolithic, it's because in the neolithic period humanity had already acquired more or less all of the necessities of life. Having adopted a sedentary existence, it practised farming and had already domesticated animals. Of course, it hadn't yet developed writing, and an organized state probably didn't exist: humans lived in small communities, but my impression is that they were happier than today. . . . Of course I know nothing about any of this: I haven't lived in the neolithic period, but I have felt what you might call the spirit of the neolithic when I lived with the Indian tribes of Brazil. I'm certainly not claiming that these Indians are from the neolithic – their civilization is as old as ours – but even so, their life-style can't have been much different, and still today isn't much different, from that of individuals living in the neolithic era.¹¹

Métraux's confession, or profession of faith, resumes perfectly the content, but also the ambivalences and ambiguities, of the neolithic fiction as it functions in Lévi-Strauss, a fiction that is both objectively impossible and subjectively necessary. If such fabulation fails to satisfy the scientific mission of the human science of anthropology, it at least gives voice to the personal mythologies without which, it could be argued, such a mission is impossible.

NOTES

- 1 See Eribon, 1991: 168.
- 2 Lévi-Strauss, 1977: 373.
- 3 Page references for *Tristes tropiques* will henceforth be given in the main text, the reference for the original French text following that of the English translation. Modifications to the translation are in square brackets.
- 4 This disillusionment with the philosophy of the day was of course not peculiar to Lévi-Strauss. A fellow Americanist Jacques Soustelle describes his own conversion from philosophy to ethnology in much the same way (Soustelle, 1967: 14–15).
- 5 See Demoule, 1982: 54.
- 6 Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 350–1.
- 7 A crisis allegorized in the play 'The Apotheosis of Augustus', related in Chapter 37.

- 8 See Chapter 28, 'A Writing Lesson'. The theory of writing proposed in this chapter is of course the object of an extended critique by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1976: 101–40).
- 9 See Chapter 7 of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969); also 'The Concept of Archaism in Anthropology' in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (1977), Chapter 6.
- 10 See Eribon, 1991: vii–viii.
- 11 Cited in Hollier, 1973: 414–15; my translation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Demoule, J.-P. (1982) 'Le Néolithique, une révolution?' [The Neolithic, a Revolution?], *Le Débat* 20: 54–75.
- Derrida, J. (1976) *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Eribon, D. (1991) *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, trans. P. Wissing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hollier, D. (1973) *Panorama des sciences humaines* [Panorama of the Human Sciences]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969) *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. J. H. Bell, J. R. von Sturmer and R. Needham. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1977) *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 1, trans. C. Jacobson and B. Grundfest Schoepf. Harmondsworth, Mx: Penguin Books.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1978) *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, trans. M. Layton. Harmondsworth, Mx: Penguin Books.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1984) *Tristes tropiques*, trans. J. and D. Weightman. Harmondsworth, Mx: Penguin Books.
- Soustelle, J. (1967) *Les quatre soleils. Souvenirs et réflexions d'un ethnologue au Mexique* [The Four Suns. Recollections and Reflections of an Anthropologist in Mexico]. Paris: Plon.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON is Senior Lecturer in French at Keele University, UK. He was Junior Research Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1988–92, and Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Research Institute of the University of California, Irvine, January–June 1992. Author of *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (1993), he is currently preparing a book on Lévi-Strauss and French anthropology. He is the general editor of the journal *Paragraph*.

Address: Department of Modern Languages (French Section), Keele University, Keele, Staffs ST5 5BG, UK. [email:mla01@cc.keele.ac.uk]