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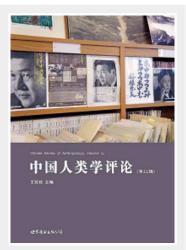
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人类学在线

当代人类学家之一: Claude Lévi-Strauss

来自: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

研究聚焦

Biography

Claude Lévi-Strauss, born in Brussels, grew up in Paris, living in a street of the 16th arrondissement named after the artist Nicolas Poussin, whose work he later admired and wrote about. [1] Lévi-Strauss\'s father was also a painter, and Claude was born in Brussels because his father had taken a contract to paint there. [2]

At the Sorbonne in Paris, Lévi-Strauss studied law and philosophy. After an epiphany resulting from a late night conversation strolling around the grounds of True\'s Yard, King\'s Lynn with renowned cryptozoologist Lewis Daly, [citation needed] he did not pursue his study of law but agrégated in philosophy in 1931. In 1935, after a few years of secondary-school teaching, he took up a last-minute offer to be part of a French cultural mission to Brazil in which he would serve as a visiting professor at the University of São Paulo.

Lévi-Strauss lived in Brazil from 1935 to 1939. It was during this time that he undertook his first ethnographic fieldwork, conducting periodic research forays into the Mato Grosso and the Amazon Rainforest. He studied first the Guaycuru and Bororo Indian tribes, living among them for a while. In 1938 he returned for a second, year-long expedition to study the Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib societies. It was this experience that cemented Lévi-Strauss's professional identity as an anthropologist. Edmund Leach suggests, from Lévi-Strauss's own accounts in Tristes Tropiques, that he could not have spent more than a few weeks in any one place and was never able to converse easily with any of his native informants in their native language.

He returned to France in 1939 to take part in the war effort, and was assigned as a liaison agent to the Maginot Line. After the French capitulation in 1940, he was employed at a lycée in Montpellier, but was then dismissed under the racial laws. (Lévi-Strauss\'s family, originally from Alsace, was of Judaic ancestry.) In 1941, he was offered a position in New York and granted admission to the United States. A series of voyages brought him via South America to Puerto Rico where he was investigated by the FBI after German letters in his luggage aroused the suspicions of customs agents. Lévi-Strauss spent most of the war in New York City. Together with other intellectual emigrés, he taught at the New School for Social Research. Along with Jacques Maritain, Henri Focillon and Roman Jakobson, he was a founding member of the École Libre des Hautes Études, a sort of university-in-exile for French academics.

The war years in New York were formative for Lévi-Strauss in several ways. His relationship with Jakobson helped shape his theoretical outlook (Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss are considered to be two of the central figures on which structuralist thought is based). In addition, Lévi-Strauss was also exposed to the American anthropology espoused by Franz Boas, who taught at Columbia University. In 1942, while having dinner at the Faculty House at Columbia, Boas died of a heart attack in Lévi-Strauss's arms. This intimate association with Boas gave his early work a distinctive American tilt that helped facilitate its acceptance in the U.S. After a brief stint from 1946 to 1947 as a cultural attaché to the French embassy in Washington, DC, Lévi-Strauss returned to Paris in 1948. It was at this time that he received his doctorate from the Sorbonne by submitting, in the French tradition, both a "major" and a "minor" thesis. These were The Family and Social Life of the Nambikwara Indians and The Elementary Structures of Kinship.

The Elementary Structures of Kinship was published the next year and quickly came to be regarded as one of the most important anthropological works on kinship. It was even reviewed favorably by Simone de Beauvoir, who viewed it as an important statement of the position of women in non-western cultures. A play on the title of Durkheim\'s famous Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Elementary Structures re-examined how people organized their families by examining the logical structures that underlay relationships rather than their contents. While British anthropologists such as Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown argued that kinship was based on descent from a common ancestor, Lévi-Strauss argued that kinship was based on the alliance between two families that formed when women from one group married men from another. [3]

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Lévi-Strauss continued to publish and experienced considerable professional success. On his return to France, he became involved with the administration of the CNRS and the Musée de 1'Homme before finally becoming chair of the fifth section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, the 'Religious Sciences' section previously chaired by Marcel Mauss, which he renamed "Comparative Religion of Non-Literate Peoples".

While Lévi-Strauss was well known in academic circles, it was in 1955 that he became one of France's best known intellectuals by publishing Tristes Tropiques. This book was essentially a memoir detailing his time as a French expatriate throughout the 1930s. Lévi-Strauss combined exquisitely beautiful prose, dazzling philosophical meditation, and ethnographic analysis of the Amazonian peoples to produce a masterpiece. The organizers of the Prix Goncourt, for instance, lamented that they were not able to award Lévi-Strauss the prize because Tristes Tropiques was non-fiction.

Lévi-Strauss was named to a chair in Social Anthropology at the Collège de France in 1959. At roughly the same time he published Structural Anthropology, a collection of his essays which provided both examples and programmatic statements about structuralism. At the same time as he was laying the groundwork for an intellectual program, he began a series of institutions for establishing anthropology as a discipline in France, including the Laboratory for Social Anthropology where new students could be trained, and a new journal, 1\'Homme, for publishing the results of their research.

In 1962, Lévi-Strauss published what is for many people his most important work, La Pensée Sauvage. The title is a pun untranslatable in English — in English the book is known as The Savage Mind, but this title fails to capture the other possible French meaning of \'Wild Pansies\'. In French pensée means both \'thought\' and \'pansy,\' the flower, while sauvage means \'wild\' as well as \'savage\' or \'primitive\'. The book concerns primitive thought, forms of thought we all use. (Lévi-Strauss suggested the English title be Pansies for Thought, riffing off of a speech by Ophelia in Hamlet.) The French edition to this day retains a flower on the cover.

The first half of the book lays out Lévi-Strauss\'s theory of culture and mind, while the second half expands this account into a theory of history and social change. This part of the book engaged Lévi-Strauss in a heated debate with Jean-Paul Sartre over the nature of human freedom. On the one hand, Sartre\'s existentialist philosophy committed him to a position that human beings were fundamentally free to act as they pleased. On the other hand, Sartre was also a leftist who was committed to the idea that, for instance, individuals were constrained by the ideologies imposed on them by the powerful. Lévi-Strauss presented his structuralist notion of agency in opposition to Sartre. Echoes of this debate between structuralism and existentialism would eventually inspire the work of younger authors such as Pierre Bourdieu.

Now a worldwide celebrity, Lévi-Strauss spent the second half of the 1960s working on his master project, a four-volume study called Mythologiques. In it, he took a single myth from the tip of South America and followed all of its variations from group to group up through Central America and eventually into the Arctic circle, thus tracing the myth's spread from one end of the American continent to the other. He accomplished this in a typically structuralist way, examining the underlying structure of relationships between the elements of the story rather than by focusing on the content of the story itself. While Pensée Sauvage was a statement of Lévi-Strauss's big-picture theory, Mythologiques was an extended, four-volume example of analysis. Richly detailed and extremely long, it is less widely read than the much shorter and more accessible Pensée Sauvage despite its position as Lévi-Strauss's masterwork.

Lévi-Strauss completed the final volume of Mythologiques in 1971 and in 1973 he was elected to the Académie Française, France\'s highest honour for an intellectual. He is also a member of other notable academies worldwide, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He also received the Erasmus Prize in 1973. In 2003 he received the Meister-Eckhart-Prize for philosophy. He has received several honorary doctorates from universities such as Oxford, Harvard, and Columbia. He is also a recipient of the Grand-croix de la Légion d\'honneur, and is a Commandeur de 1\'ordre national du Mérite and Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres. Although retired, he continues to publish occasional meditations on art, music and poetry.

In 2008, the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade will start to publish his main works, a very rare occurrence for a living person. The same year, he became the first member of the Académie Française to reach the age of 100.

Deep Insight and "Expansive Thought"

Summary

Lévi-Strauss sought to apply the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure to anthropology. At the time, the family was traditionally considered the fundamental object of analysis, but was seen primarily as a self-contained unit consisting of a husband, a wife, and their children. Nephews, cousins, aunts, uncless and grandparents were all treated as secondary. But Lévi-Strauss argued that, akin to Saussure's notion of linguistic value, families only acquire determinate identities through relations with one another. Thus he inverted the classical view of anthropology, putting the secondary family members first and insisting on analyzing the relations between units instead of the units themselves. [4]

In his own analyses of the formation of the identities that arise through marriages between tribes, Lévi-Strauss noted that the relation between the uncle and the nephew was to the relation between brother and sister as the relation between father and son is to that between husband and wife, that is, A is to B as C is to D. Therefore if we know A, B and C, we can predict D, just as if we know A and D, we can predict B and C. The goal of Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, then, was to simplify the masses of empirical data into generalized, comprehensible relations between units, which allow for predictive laws to be identified, such as A is to B as C is to D. [4]

Similarly, Lévi-Strauss identified myths as a type of speech through which a language could be discovered. This theory attempted to explain how seemingly fantastical and arbitrary tales could be so similar across cultures. Because he

believed there was not one "authentic" version of a myth, rather that they were all manifestations of the same language, he sought to find the fundamental units of myth, namely, the mytheme. Lévi-Strauss broke each of the versions of a myth down into a series of sentences, consisting of a relation between a function and a subject. Sentences with the same function were given the same number and bundled together. These are mythemes. [5]

What Lévi-Strauss believed he had discovered when he examined the relations between mythemes was that a myth consists of nothing but binary oppositions. Oedipus, for example, consists of the overrating of blood relations and the underrating of blood relations, the autochthonous origin of mankind and the denial of the autochthonous origin of mankind. Influenced by Hegel, Lévi-Strauss believed that the human mind thinks fundamentally in these binary oppositions and their unification (the thesis, antithesis, synthesis triad), and that these are what make meaning possible. Furthermore, he considered the job of myth to be a sleight of hand, an association of an irreconcilable binary opposition with a reconcilable binary opposition, creating the illusion, or belief, that the former had been resolved. [5]

Anthropological theories

Lévi Strauss\' theories are set forth in Structural Anthropology (1958). Briefly, he considers culture a system of symbolic communication, to be investigated with methods that others have used more narrowly in the discussion of novels, political speeches, sports, and movies.

His reasoning makes best sense against the background of an earlier generation\'s social theory. He wrote about this relationship for decades.

A preference for "functionalist" explanations dominated the social sciences from the turn of the century through the 1950s, which is to say that anthropologists and sociologists tried to state what a social act or institution was for. The existence of a thing was explained if it fulfilled a function. The only strong alternative to that kind of analysis was historical explanation, accounting for the existence of a social fact by saying how it came to be.

However, the idea of social function developed in two different ways. The English anthropologist Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, who had read and admired the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, argued that the goal of anthropological research was to find the collective function, what a religious creed or a set of rules about marriage did for the social order as a whole. At back of this approach was an old idea, the view that civilization developed through a series of phases from the primitive to the modern, everywhere the same. All of the activities in a given kind of society would partake of the same character; some sort of internal logic would cause one level of culture to evolve into the next. On this view, a society can easily be thought of as an organism, the parts functioning together like parts of a body.

The more influential functionalism of Bronisław Malinowski described the satisfaction of individual needs, what a person got out of participating in a custom.

In the United States, where the shape of anthropology was set by the German-educated Franz Boas, the preference was for historical accounts. This approach had obvious problems, which Lévi-Strauss praises Boas for facing squarely.

Historical information is seldom available for non-literate cultures. The anthropologist fills in with comparisons to other cultures and is forced to rely on theories that have no evidential basis whatsoever, the old notion of universal stages of development or the claim that cultural resemblances are based on some untraced past contact between groups. Boas came to believe that no overall pattern in social development could be proven; for him, there was no history, only histories.

There are three broad choices involved in the divergence of these schools - each had to decide what kind of evidence to use; whether to emphasize the particulars of a single culture or look for patterns underlying all societies; and what the source of any underlying patterns might be, the definition of a common humanity.

Social scientists in all traditions relied on cross-cultural studies. It was always necessary to supplement information about a society with information about others. So some idea of a common human nature was implicit in each approach.

The critical distinction, then, remained: does a social fact exist because it is functional for the social order, or because it is functional for the person? Do uniformities across cultures occur because of organizational needs that must be met everywhere, or because of the uniform needs of human personality?

For Lévi-Strauss, the choice was for the demands of the social order. He had no difficulty bringing out the inconsistencies and triviality of individualistic accounts. Malinowski said, for example, that magic beliefs come into being when people need to feel a sense of control over events when the outcome was uncertain. In the Trobriand Islands, he found the proof of this claim in the rites surrounding abortions and weaving skirts. But in the same tribes, there is no magic attached to making clay pots even though it is no more certain a business than weaving. So, the explanation is not consistent. Furthermore, these explanations tend to be used in an ad hoc, superficial way - you just postulate a trait of personality when you need it.

But the accepted way of discussing organizational function didn\'t work either. Different societies might have institutions that were similar in many obvious ways and yet served different functions. Many tribal cultures divide the

tribe into two groups and have elaborate rules about how the two groups can interact. But exactly what they can do - trade, intermarry - is different in different tribes; for that matter, so are the criteria for distinguishing the groups.

Nor will it do to say that dividing-in-two is a universal need of organizations, because there are a lot of tribes that thrive without it.

For Lévi-Strauss, the methods of linguistics became a model for all his earlier examinations of society. His analogies are usually from phonology (though also later from music, mathematics, chaos theory, cybernetics and so on).

"A really scientific analysis must be real, simplifying, and explanatory," he says (in Structural Anthropology). Phonemic analysis reveals features that are real, in the sense that users of the language can recognize and respond to them. At the same time, a phoneme is an abstraction from language - not a sound, but a category of sound defined by the way it is distinguished from other categories through rules unique to the language. The entire sound-structure of a language can be generated from a relatively small number of rules.

In the study of the kinship systems that first concerned him, this ideal of explanation allowed a comprehensive organization of data that had been partly ordered by other researchers. The overall goal was to find out why family relations differed in different South American cultures. The father might have great authority over the son in one group, for example, with the relationship rigidly restricted by taboos. In another group, the mother\'s brother would have that kind of relationship with the son, while the father\'s relationship was relaxed and playful.

A number of partial patterns had been noted. Relations between the mother and father, for example, had some sort of reciprocity with those of father and son - if the mother had a dominant social status and was formal with the father, for example, then the father usually had close relations with the son. But these smaller patterns joined together in inconsistent ways.

One possible way of finding a master order was to rate all the positions in a kinship system along several dimensions. For example, the father was older than the son, the father produced the son, the father had the same sex as the son, and so on; the matrilineal uncle was older and of the same sex but did not produce the son, and so on. An exhaustive collection of such observations might cause an overall pattern to emerge.

But for Lévi Strauss, this kind of work was "analytical in appearance only." It results in a chart that is far harder to understand than the original data and is based on arbitrary abstractions (empirically, fathers are older than sons, but it is only the researcher who declares that this feature explains their relations). Furthermore, it doesn't explain anything. The explanation it offers is tautological - if age is crucial, then age explains a relationship. And it does not offer the possibility of inferring the origins of the structure.

A proper solution to the puzzle is to find a basic unit of kinship which can explain all the variations. It is a cluster of four roles - brother, sister, father, son. These are the roles that must be involved in any society that has an incest taboo requiring a man to obtain a wife from some man outside his own hereditary line. A brother can give away his sister, for example, whose son might reciprocate in the next generation by allowing his own sister to marry exogamously. The underlying demand is a continued circulation of women to keep various clans peacefully related.

Right or wrong, this solution displays the qualities of structural thinking. Even though Lévi-Strauss frequently speaks of treating culture as the product of the axioms and corollaries that underlie it, or the phonemic differences that constitute it, he is concerned with the objective data of field research. He notes that it is logically possible for a different atom of kinship structure to exist - sister, sister\'s brother, brother\'s wife, daughter - but there are no real-world examples of relationships that can be derived from that grouping.

The purpose of structuralist explanation is to organize real data in the simplest effective way. All science, he says, is either structuralist or reductionist. In confronting such matters as the incest taboo, one is facing an objective limit of what the human mind has so far accepted. One could hypothesize some biological imperative underlying it, but so far as social order is concerned, the taboo has the effect of an irreducible fact. The social scientist can only work with the structures of human thought that arise from it.

And structural explanations can be tested and refuted. A mere analytic scheme that wishes causal relations into existence is not structuralist in this sense.

Lévi-Strauss\' later works are more controversial, in part because they impinge on the subject matter of other scholars. He believed that modern life and all history was founded on the same categories and transformations that he had discovered in the Brazilian back country - The Raw and the Cooked, From Honey to Ashes, The Naked Man (to borrow some titles from the Mythologiques). For instance he compares anthropology to musical serialism and defends his "philosophical" approach. He also pointed out that the modern view of primitive cultures was simplistic in denying them a history. The categories of myth did not persist among them because nothing had happened - it was easy to find the evidence of defeat, migration, exile, repeated displacements of all the kinds known to recorded history. Instead, the mythic categories had encompassed these changes.

He argued for a view of human life as existing in two timelines simultaneously, the eventful one of history and the long

cycles in which one set of fundamental mythic patterns dominates and then perhaps another. In this respect, his work resembles that of Fernand Braudel, the historian of the Mediterranean and \'la longue durée,\' the cultural outlook and forms of social organization that persisted for centuries around that sea.

The structuralist approach to myth

Lévi-Strauss sees a basic paradox in the study of myth. On one hand, mythical stories are fantastic and unpredictable: thus, the content of myth seems completely arbitrary. On the other hand, myths from different cultures are surprisingly similar:

On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. $[\cdots]$ But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: If the content of myth is contingent [i.e., arbitrary], how are we to explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?[6]

Lévi-Strauss proposed that universal laws must govern mythical thought and resolve this seeming paradox, producing similar myths in different cultures. Each myth may seem unique, but he proposed it is actually just one particular instance of a universal law of human thought. In studying myth, Lévi-Strauss tries "to reduce apparently arbitrary data to some kind of order, and to attain a level at which a kind of necessity becomes apparent, underlying the illusions of liberty".[7]

According to Lévi-Strauss, "mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution".[8] In other words, myths consist of (1) elements that oppose or contradict each other and (2) other elements that "mediate", or resolve, those oppositions.

For example, Lévi-Strauss thinks the trickster of many Native American mythologies acts as a "mediator". Lévi-Strauss\'s argument hinges on two facts about the Native American trickster: (1) the trickster has a contradictory and unpredictable personality; (2) the trickster is almost always a raven or a coyote. Lévi-Strauss argues that the raven and coyote "mediate" the opposition between life and death. The relationship between agriculture and hunting is analogous to the opposition between life and death: agriculture is solely concerned with producing life (at least up until harvest time); hunting is concerned with producing death. Furthermore, the relationship between herbivores and beasts of prey is analogous to the relationship between agriculture and hunting: like agriculture, herbivores are concerned with plants; like hunting, beasts of prey are concerned with catching meat. Lévi-Strauss points out that the raven and coyote eat carrion and are therefore halfway between herbivores and beasts of prey: like beasts of prey, they eat meat; like herbivores, they don't catch their food. Thus, he argues, "we have a mediating structure of the following type":[8]

By uniting herbivore traits with traits of beasts of prey, the raven and coyote somewhat reconcile herbivores and beasts of prey: in other words, they mediate the opposition between herbivores and beasts of prey. As we have seen, this opposition is ultimately analogous to the opposition between life and death. Therefore, the raven and coyote ultimately mediate the opposition between life and death. This, Lévi-Strauss believes, explains why the coyote and raven have a contradictory personality when they appear as the mythical trickster:

The trickster is a mediator. Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character. [9]

Because the raven and coyote reconcile profoundly opposed concepts (i.e., life and death), their own mythical personalities must reflect this duality or contradiction: in other words, they must have a contradictory, "tricky" personality.

This theory about the structure of myth helps support Lévi-Strauss\'s more basic theory about human thought. According to this more basic theory, universal laws govern all areas of human thought:

If it were possible to prove in this instance, too, that the apparent arbitrariness of the mind, its supposedly spontaneous flow of inspiration, and its seemingly uncontrolled inventiveness [are ruled by] laws operating at a deeper level [...] if the human mind appears determined even in the realm of mythology, a fortiori it must also be determined in all its spheres of activity.[7]

Out of all the products of culture, myths seem the most fantastic and unpredictable. Therefore, Lévi-Strauss claims, if even mythical thought obeys universal laws, then all human thought must obey universal laws.

The Savage Mind / Bricoleur and Engineer

Levi-Strauss developed the comparison of the Bricoleur and Engineer in The Savage Mind. "Bricoleur" has its origin in the old French verb Bricoler which refers to extraneous movements in ball games, billiards, hunting, shooting, and riding. It has come to mean one who works with his hands, usually in devious or "crafty" ways when compared to the true craftsman, whom Levi-Strauss equates with the Engineer. The Bricoleur is adept at many tasks and at putting preexisting things together in new ways. The Engineer deals with projects in their entirety, taking into account the availability of

materials and tools required. The Bricoleur approximates the mind of "the savage mind" and the Engineer approximates the scientific mind. Levi-Strauss says that the universe of the Bricoleur is closed, and he is often forced to make do with whatever is at hand, whereas the universe of the Engineer is open in that he is able to create new tools and materials. However, both live within a restrictive reality, and so the Engineer is forced to consider the preexisting set of theoretical and practical knowledge, of technical means, in a similar way to the Bricoleur.

Criticism

Lévi-Strauss\'s theory on the origin of the Trickster has been criticized on a number of points by anthropologists. Stanley Diamond notes that while the secular civilized often consider the concepts of life and death to be polar, primitive cultures often see them "as aspects of a single condition, the condition of existence."[10] Diamond remarks that Lévi-Strauss did not reach such a conclusion through inductive reasoning but simply by working backwards from the evidence to the "a priori mediated concepts" [11] of "life" and "death", which he reached by assumption of a necessary progression from "life" to "agriculture" to "herbivorous animals", and from "death" to "warfare" to "beasts of prey". For that matter, the coyote is well known to hunt in addition to scavenging and the raven has also been known to act as a bird of prey, which do not well fit Lévi-Strauss\' conception. Nor does it explain why a scavenger such as a bear would never appear as the Trickster. Diamond further remarks that "the Trickster names "raven" and coyote" which Lévi-Strauss explains can be arrived at with greater economy on the basis of, let us say, the cleverness of the animals involved, their ubiquity, elusiveness, capacity to make mischief, their undomesticated reflection of certain human traits." [12] Finally, Lévi-Strauss\' analysis does not appear to be capable of explaining why representations of the Trickster in other areas of the world make use of such animals as the spider and mantis.

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