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Claude Lévi-Strauss, Our Contemporary

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Let us begin with a photo: here, we see Claude Lévi-Strauss going up the Seine from Rouen to Paris in a canoe, accompanied by paddlers from the Haida tribe of British Columbia. [1] It is the fall of 1989, and the exhibition "The Americas of Claude Lévi-Strauss" is on display at the Musée de l'Homme. The 18-metre canoe, made from red cedar, was crafted by Native American-Canadian artist Bill Reid; it acts as a symbol of the indigenous art of the ancient Pacific Northwest in its prime. The canoe follows the Seine from Rouen to Paris, where the anthropologist joins the oarsmen before being received together at City Hall by the mayor at the time, Jacques Chirac. You have to imagine this scene. The press has given us a partial account: [2] for six days, the countryside of Normandy and then of Île-de-France slipped past Native American bodies; on the bank, French children with multicoloured feathers in their hair cried, "The Indians are coming! The Indians are coming!"; and finally, the incongruous arrival in an occidental city at the end of the twentieth century. The political power of this staging – to which Lévi-Strauss graciously submitted himself – lies in the slow revival of the past it is presenting, symbolically inverting the terms of the discovery: this time, it's the Native Americans who come to meet the white men. The terrible encounter of the sixteenth century, often called the "discovery of America", which for Lévi-Strauss inaugurated the cataclysm of modernity, is hereby replayed in reverse. What was done can be undone. The past comes back in a present that can, sometimes, act as redeemer. In any case, one can hope so.

Lévi-Strauss lived the clamour of history during a life that espoused a strenuous twentieth

century filled with episodes of torment as he, ostracized by anti-Jewish laws during World War II, had to go into exile. In an attempt to decipher/organize our world and while facing these extremes, he opposed not only science (notably anthropological science), but also, and in an audacious association, Native American mythology to "primitive thought". If, by affinity and professional ethos, he was moved by one or rather several pasts: prehistory, the Renaissance, the 19th century, he saw these periods less as golden ages than as triggers or tools for toppling today's certitudes. To reveal what is archaic in the present is to be actively contemporary: Claude Lévi-Strauss's late contributions in the domain of new parenthoods, art and relationships between men and nature proved to be just that. And, beyond the illusions of our modernity, he outlined the horizon of a humanism truly reconciled.

Claude Lévi-Strauss with a Haida ritual cloak, River Seine, 1989.

Monique Lévi-Strauss Collection

The World Order and the Unpredictability of History

If Lévi-Strauss did not essentialize the catastrophe of the past century – be it called the "Shoah", the Holocaust, the destruction of Jews during the Second World War – he stated rather, in a way that seems iconoclastic today that these catastrophes have happened regularly in the history of humanity. He and his family, for example, went through it, as did (among others) all French-born Jews. His biography was disrupted by the Second World War, and, before that, the Dreyfus Affair. Recounted by his parents – Lévi-Strauss was born in 1908 – it was part of the family's collective memory. It was also, of course, disrupted by the First World War, which he lived through as a child patriot in Versailles at the home of his grandfather, a great rabbi at the synagogue.

The anthropologist with a "view from afar" was first a hot-headed young man, who tackled his present head-on, the present being the 1920s and '30s, by attempting to alter it via the revolutionary route: he was a socialist activist in the SFIO, a French Socialist party, with radical ideological choices but who was never tempted by Bolshevism. At the end of the 1930s, an ethnologic quest had replaced his Socialist aspirations in some fashion. Lévi-Strauss came back from Brazil only to plunge into a strange war which, because of his Judaism, led him on the path of exile to the United States – more precisely to New York, where he arrived in June of 1941.

Let us note the role played by chance in this period: for example, the Brazilian consul was preparing to stamp his visa to return to São Paulo when he was stopped in his tracks by an officer of the Vichy government. Had it happened two seconds earlier, Lévi-Strauss would have gone back to South America and not to the United States, which would have obviously changed matters. Moreover, Claude Lévi-Strauss spent the months of the Battle of France, the installation of the Vichy regime and the anti-Jewish decrees and the departure – essentially from June 1940 to April 1941 – like a "zombie", not understanding or anticipating anything. He even thought of returning to Paris, once discharged, to take up the appointment he was offered as a philosophy teacher at the Lycée Henri IV, without realizing that his Judaism nullified the decision. The present is not transparent to he who lives it.

His exile in New York, from 1941 to 1947, is certainly a crucial commencement episode that the young anthropologist took advantage of, enriching his palette as well as his intellectual and existential world. It was also, at the time, a long period of anxiety and a painful separation, notably from his parents to whom he wrote each week and of whom he did knew little. During the war years, the Lévi-Strausses lived a difficult and chaotic life, like many Jews at the time: a clandestine life between the Cévennes and Drôme under false identities, thanks to friends who lodged and hid them. They changed their last name to Luce-Saunier. Only the initials of their real last name lived on as a fragile, patronymic reminiscence. Remember that in the United States, Lévi-Strauss called himself Claude L. Strauss, in order to not be confused with the jeans manufacturer. If these situations were not comparable, the mutilations of the family name were habitual, and attested to this episode of intense crisis. The family's Parisian apartment was occupied, their goods dispossessed. Fifteen or so years later, a document substantiated actions of partial reparation that were carried out by Jewish mutual assistance associations after the war. But the essence of their material world from before the war had forever disappeared.

The intellectual temperament of Claude Lévi-Strauss matched the history of sciences, notably of young social sciences, as he saw in science a tool for classification of the world. More generally, the knowledge process that Lévi-Strauss described magnificently in *Tristes Tropiques* was, for him, a sort of epiphany where the perceptible and the intelligible met in the uncovering of a profound reality. Geology was one of his three "mistresses" (alongside Marxism and psychoanalysis). Each time, knowledge brings an invisible rationality to light behind the disorder of a landscape, the metamorphoses of capital, the delusions of a madman.

> When the miracle occurs, as it sometimes does; when, on one side and the other of the hidden crack, there are suddenly to be found cheek-by-jowl two green plants of hidden species, each of which has chosen the most favourable soil; and when at the same time two ammonites with unevenly intricate involutions can be glimpsed in the rocks, thus testifying in their own way to a gap of several tens of thousands of years suddenly space and time become one: the living diversity of the moment juxtaposes and perpetuates the ages. [3]

Like a good detective novel (of which he would be a lifelong fervent reader), science bestows coherence on the world by establishing invisible rules that make it possible to explain the appearance of phenomena but also apparent anomalies, enigmas or aberrations. This occurs thanks to a meticulous investigation that aims to uncover a world more real than that of appearances, a deep, hidden reality (sometimes threatening, as in detective novels) but which is the only one worthy of being called true. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the French sociological tradition (with Durkheim) had sought to produce a description of the social world as a totality, obeying its own – invisible – laws. Lévi-Strauss shared this vision in his first major work, published in 1949: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. This mammoth book contains a bibliography of more than 7000 references. It intended to disentangle the assortment of customs related to marriage and union, including the most incongruous. The goal was to reveal the "rules" of kinship that the anthropologist tried to reunite in a simple schema, articulated around the prohibition of incest and the transition from Nature to Culture, which is the capital rule. The immense diversity of responses given by primitive societies is thus interpreted as a rational variation on this single rule, essentially the cultural equivalent to a natural law. (It is important to overcome endogamic passion and to live in society with a relative stability). One never picks a spouse randomly, even if one imagines it so. Lévi-Strauss put the existence of unconscious social rules at the heart of intimacy and of personal choice, as Freud had on an individual level. In all of his work, Lévi-Strauss conceived the scientific quest as research into the "Rules of the Game" – the great game of the social world – whose hidden order is revealed by history.

This *hybris* of the classification of the real is expressed metaphorically in one of the celebrated instruments of the Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale, founded by Lévi-Strauss in 1960 when he was appointed to the Collège de France: Commonly known as "the Files", the *Human Relations Area Files* were published by Yale University with only 25 reproductions worldwide. [4] The Laboratoire was trusted with the exploitation of a collection of documents, roughly two million records (as of 1961) gathered in 380 metal filing cabinets, with a total weight of 7.5 tons and a volume of 18 cubic metres. The pages were coded, line by line, from preselected items, and thus allowed rapid extraction for base documentation of any ethnological problem reported at the time. Bringing order and filing the world!

What is most interesting is that this desire to put the world in order was seen by Lévi-Strauss as being at work not only in our occidental societies, which have conquered rationality and scientific discourse, but also in what he would later call "la pensée sauvage" ("the savage mind"). He identified this union in a book that went down in history in 1962 precisely because it carried out this iconoclastic association that, for many of his colleagues and erudite friends, was considered sacrilegious.

At the beginning of the book, readers take a world tour (Philippines, Southern California, Gabon, Northern Rhodesia, etc.) of the ethnobotanical and ethno-zoological lexicons of the primitive populations. They discover, in amazement, the precision of the terms, the attention to detail and the concern for distinctions that characterize an encyclopaedic

knowledge whose rigour and richness have nothing to envy in Western scientific knowledge. This is the essential and revolutionary thesis of the book distilled, with examples to support it, in a whirlwind of ethnographic references: the fifteen bat species distinguished by the Negrito of the Philippines; the hundreds of plant species known by the Navaho lexicon (North America); the medical knowledge of the Siberian peoples using spiders and white worms against sterility, the crushed cockroach in hernia problems, macerated red worms for rheumatism, etc. This shimmering introduction insists as much on extraordinary erudition as on the rigorous classification revealed by knowledge that is not utilitarian, but strictly intellectual: "Introducing the beginning of order in the universe". [5]

Essentially, what he terms "primitive thought" is the thirst for total comprehension of the universe, undertaken through the study of plants, animals, constellations and rocks. The study itself is conducted through regrouping, contrasting and distinguishing them, which constitutes overall a thought exercise of which totemism represents only one particular case. Native American mythology, in its entirety, is interpreted by Lévi-Strauss not as a collection of irrational fables, but rather as accounts that seek to give complete answers to a series of issues addressed early on by the humanities: Why the variation between day and night? How can one become two, by means of reproduction? Why death? What is the right distance between men and women, between the earth and the sky? And so on.

In the four volumes that he methodically produced during the 1960s and that made up the monumental *Mythologiques*, Native American societies are characterized by a boundless quest for clarity. The myths explain "why, different from the outset, things became the way they are, and why they cannot be otherwise – because if they changed in a particular domain, due to the homology of domains, the entire world order would be shaken". [6]

According to Lévi-Strauss, if everything can be explained in Native American culture by contrasting our societies, history is a sort of residual clarity, partially unpredictable, the "it happened" that we cannot fully comprehend. That is why, though he appreciated history as a discipline and was close to many historians, he did not have much respect for the (generally implicit) philosophies of history that are sometimes the backbone of historical production. The idea that there are laws of history, in the scientific sense, seemed false to him, hence the old quarrel with the Marxists and with Sartre. There are no laws that govern societal development, and it is extremely difficult to give meaning to "landmark events" such as the French Revolution. Reading Michelet, Taine, or Albert Soboul, for instance, brings about very different interpretations/significations on the event. In summary, for Lévi-Strauss, history, as taught and celebrated in our societies, functions essentially as a myth. For example, depending on the ideology with which one looks at the French Revolution, be it Marxist or reactionary, the myth takes on very different meanings. Here again, he brings together, in one iconoclastic gesture, occidental worlds and primitive societies, both of which are fuelled by myth.

The "View from Afar"

Little by little, the anthropologist claimed a "view from afar" as a sort of professional deformation that, upon his return to his country, made him look at his world and the West in a new – and critical – way. As he grew older – but this happened early in his life in the 1950s and when he returned to Europe after the war – he began to cultivate a sort of "lack of adhesion" to his present. He was simultaneously out of and detached from it. For example, while structural anthropology began to entice students and French intellectuals and started to appear like a new modernist paradigm, Lévi-Strauss took a step back from modern endeavours of the time: he claimed to like neither the Nouveau Roman nor serial music, and was uninterested in what he considered to be contemporary art. Later, in a collection of texts that he called "A View from Afar", he distanced himself significantly from the prevailing beliefs regarding "creativity", human rights, and liberty – but more on that later. Lévi-Strauss declared that he did not like his century and its arrogance. On the other hand, he said many times that he considered himself a man of the nineteenth century, a time he was linked to by intimate objects and a familial collective memory. He would have preferred to live in this century (provided, he specified, he would have come down "on the right side of the fence"). Lévi-Strauss was full of temporal imaginations of times he hadn't lived in; if the 19th century held a decisive place, it is the sixteenth century of the Renaissance that provided his love of beginnings.

His favourite intermediary here is Jean de Léry, a Protestant Genevan who left for Brazil in 1556 and lived with the Tupi tribe in the Guanabara Bay, now Rio, for several months. De Léry recorded the experience in a book (*Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, 1578) that acted as Lévi-Strauss' handbook in Brazil to the point that one could say he tried to discover indigenous reality through the eyes of a man from the sixteenth century, and a special one at that. Nothing disrupts his observation. Why? Because unlike his enemy brother André Thevet, author of the *Singularités de la France antarctique*, Léry had the talent to free himself from a vulgate of discovery which was already in place only fifty years after the first European visit to the Brazilian coast. His sixteenth century was a time when intercultural contacts had not yet become routine, where something of a primal amazement remained. In the inaugural encounter between two worlds, each side measures and examines the other, with an innocent curiosity and an equal dignity. There was a capacity to observe the Other, to be pushed by him and to account for it according to a very different scenario from the golden legend of Western modernity approaching the lands of barbarism. Lévi-Strauss found this capacity to observe the Other in the works of Jean de Léry, but more generally in the century of Montaigne and Rabelais: "There is something about these people, like Rabelais or Montaigne, a wonderful freshness of perspective that will soon disappear". [7]

Claude Lévi-Strauss thus provided for a complicated relationship to his present; he liked to employ almost a time machine-like approach. In a general sense, it is practical to place him in the "antimodern" category, even if Antoine Compagnon used this label primarily for writers and not for scholars, but Lévi-Strauss blurs the line of this opposition. He was a modern scholar in the sense that, in his interpretations, he disassociated himself from those who came before him and conceived a structuralist paradigm that appeared as a strong and

eminently modern programme of the defiant science of the second half of the twentieth century (connections to linguistics, cybernetics, dialogue prospects with the hard sciences, etc.). On the other hand, if there is one thing that he saved from our historical modernity – meaning, this moment of Western evolution that spanned from the sixteenth to the twentieth century – it is surely science, and belief in science (19th century), which for him is on a par with artistic production and is something beautiful and worthy of existence.

As for the rest, he adopted positions that were somewhat critical. Beginning at the end of the 1950s, and even more so at the beginning of the 1980s, he maintained a violent discourse against the modernist revolution in art that began with impressionism and continued throughout the twentieth century. By refusing direct portrayal, modern art dissolved the object and recorded an inevitable world loss, itself prefiguring a more and more limited communication with a society that no longer understood its meaning. From this perspective, modern art is trapped in the stalemate of a discourse on itself. Hence the growing obsolescence and futility of the artistic vogues and waves in the 20th century, the cascade of its movements, the frenzy of what was new, the pomposity of its avant-gardes, unfolding under the impervious regard of a public "immunized against the art virus". His critique is entirely linked to the art in primitive societies that, on the other hand, ascertains a hold on the world, a shared meaning, an immutability and a technique forged in the continuity of immemorial gestures, like the art of basketry to which he paid homage in one of his last texts. What ended up constituting a true aesthetic created a scandal in the 1980s when Lévi-Strauss published "Le métier perdu" ("The Lost Craft") in *Le Débat*.

In the analysis of societies, Lévi-Strauss favoured continuity over rupture (professional deformation), insisting on the cost of large historical *tabula rasa*, like that of the French Revolution: the desire to create an *homme nouveau*, which brings in the end, a rift in traditional solidarities that, at the local level, constituted protection for men; the violence of an abstract revolutionary individualism in which one finds him/herself alone, bare, facing a distant power, etc. Lévi-Strauss preferred the historical evolution of Great Britain, which, in his mind, did not go through a large revolutionary dissolution (though he could have been wrong, since Great Britain went through it before France in the seventeenth century), or that of Japan, where he was fascinated to note that the great Meiji rupture (1868: entry into the industrial world and opening of the country after centuries of voluntary isolation) occurred not in the form of a revolution, but rather as an imperial restoration. For Lévi-Strauss, no matter whether his analysis was correct or not, Japan played its modernity cards differently by conserving its habits and customs.

In general, Lévi-Strauss was quite unhampered in his critique of historical and artistic modernity. He even extended it to politics, with regard to what in general it has that is more satisfactory for our conscience – political democracy and human rights. Here as well, Lévi-Strauss set off a grenade at the heart of our satisfactions, as rather early on (as early as 1950) he made himself the denigrator of these almost sacred "rights of men", the prerogative of a humanism that formed the human kingdom as separate from all other kingdoms. Claude

Lévi-Strauss set out to promote a more general humanism founded on the "rights of the living" where the human, animal, and vegetal kingdoms must cohabit as they did in the world of Native American mythology. A Native American hunter cannot undertake a raid and recklessly kill animals outside of those necessary for his nutrition because they are gifted with the same attributes as men, and will take revenge. The hunter will be punished one way or another. It is this harmony, this equilibrium between the different forms of life that industrial society has compromised. This truth that is evident today was rarely articulated with as much force as that used by Claude Lévi-Strauss, especially at the end of *The Origins of Table Manners*, a book published against the grain in 1968:

> We are accustomed from infancy to fear impurity from the outside. When they proclaim, by contrast, that 'hell is we ourselves' savage people give a lesson of modesty that one would like to believe we are still capable of hearing. In this century when mankind persists in destroying innumerable living forms – after so many societies whose richness and diversity constituted from time immemorial humanity's clearest patrimony – it has without doubt never been more necessary to say – as do these myths – that well-ordered harmony does not begin by the self [soi-même], but rather places the world before life, life before man, the respect for other beings before the love of self; and that even a sojourn of one or two million years on this earth, since in any case our stay knows a limit, does not serve as an excuse for any species, even our own, to appropriate [the planet] like a thing and to lead it without modesty or discretion. [8]

This sentence was resonant at the time, and even more so today. Because the "deference toward the world" guides certain uses and certain practices less than ever, Lévi-Strauss's warning is politically significant. Little by little, the pathos of modernity, still present in *Tristes Tropiques*, made way for a free and accepted rebuff of progress: "In what we call progress, 90% of efforts are to rectify the harm related to the benefits that are brought on by the remaining 10%". [9]

Primitive societies put an inordinate effort into practice, surprising to a modern mind, to resist transformation. Lévi-Strauss' "view from afar" led him to leave his contemporaries' regime of historicity. In contrast with them, he did not value change, feared loss, and pursued conservation. The acceleration of time and of social rhythms seemed to him the great danger that went hand in hand with the general integration of a singular and indivisible humanity, much to his chagrin. This way of presenting (and of shifting) issues was strictly political, even if (or rather, because) it subverted the categories of classic politics: "progress", the left", the "right", "reaction", "reform", "revolution"… Lévi-Strauss was a reactionary insofar as he advocated a "return", but even in this he was an ultra-reactionary: far from wanting a return to the Ancien Régime, he would have liked, had it been possible, a return to the Neolithic Era. This is evidenced by what he wrote in a personal letter to Raymond Aron, who, we imagine, was flabbergasted: "Man's salvation should have consisted of refusing, in time, the role of the object or the agent [of change, of transformation]; in other words, if you allow me to make this simplification, of choosing the Neolithic Age". [10]

Radical Neolithic.

Being Contemporary

The weariness of progress that Lévi-Strauss analysed, and that we experience with cruel intensity today, was revealed by the anthropologist who stepped outside of his time. This is one way of being contemporary: to use the strata of the pasts that haunt us not as refuge (though they may serve as refuge after all), not to cultivate our melancholy, but to shatter our stereotypes and our most intimate certainties: that change is good; technological progress is good; opening up to others and moving is good; children need a father and mother, etc.

To finish, I would like to insist on the strictly political function of these pasts and this "elsewhere" as they remind us that past and primitive societies provided responses to problems that are equally our own. If we do not take responsibility for them, it is good to at least acknowledge them or even make them our own in order to experience the singularity of our historical trajectory.

This is apparent in the remarks that were published after Lévi-Strauss' death and that were tied to the hottest news stories, for example artificial procreation, new parenthoods and filiations, epidemic diseases, connections with animals … The title of *La Repubblica*'s article collection, "We are all cannibals", expresses a profound gesture of Lévi-Straussian politics: the stakes are not a simple bringing together a "them" and "us" but to proceed to a savage requalification of our present day. It did not seek to denounce its barbarism but rather to "take a detour" by way of ancient or exotic societies that were able to confront the same problems and offer solutions that were "good food for thought". Lévi-Strauss gives many examples in our very contemporary day-to-day. He thus presents a lesson in liberalism and prudence (notably for the legislator, whom he encourages to restrain himself), in demystification of our modern fetishes (science, progress…), and reveals the inner workings of modernity (the barbarism of our butcheries and our agro-business). This gesture of universalization of the uncivilized in us – rather than excluding it as subhuman – carries within it a programme that partially matches that of Bruno Latour: to once again become the non-modern beings that we never stopped being. [11] Such a statement seeks to diminish the double great division that founded modernity: between them and us; between nature and society.

When he thought of the treatment of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, or the disease said to come from mad cows fed with animal meal, in the frame of an "expanded cannibalism" (a transplant-like ingestion and cows transformed by men into cannibals), it was not to horrify us but rather to demystify and normalize cannibalism which is, at its base, still an ethnocentric category. This "expanded cannibalism" allows Lévi-Strauss to represent our carnivorous practice as a barbaric madness when, with the repulsion of one of great sensitivity, he evokes the horror of the butcher's stalls where we admire pieces of bloody meat:

> Indeed, a day may come when the idea that human beings in the past

> raised and slaughtered living things for food and complacently displayed slabs of their flesh in shop windows will inspire the same revulsion as what travelers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries felt about the cannibal meals of American, Oceanian, or African indigenous peoples. [12]

So, does Lévi Strauss call on us all to become vegetarians? For him it is certain that meat for food is a luxury that neither animals nor humans will soon be able to afford. However, the ethnologist, in his ordinary life, does not abandon his diet of meat. As a gourmet, he loves it in all kinds of ways, although always in small quantities. [13] Contrary to what one might think, he does not prescribe abandoning meat. Adopting a prophetic turn of phrase, rare by his pen, he invokes the advent of a future humanity for whom eating meat will be a rarefied, costly and almost risky practice.

> Meat will appear on the menu only under extraordinary circumstances. It will be consumed with the same mix of pious reverence and anxiety that, according to ancient travelers, accompanied the cannibal meals of certain peoples. In both cases, it is a matter of communing with ancestors and of incorporating into ourselves—at our own risk and peril—the dangerous substance of living beings that were or have become enemies. [14]

Eating meat from living beings (human or animal: basically, it doesn't matter), yes, but with the respect they deserve... This is the ultimate wisdom lesson for mad cows.

Likewise, with regard to the problems of artificial procreation that is much discussed today: from artificial insemination, egg donation, surrogacy, freezing of embryos, to *in vitro* fertilization with sperm from the husband or another man and an egg from the wife or another woman. He wrote in 1986:

> Children born from such manipulations will be able to, depending on the situation, have a father and mother as is the norm, one mother and two fathers, two mothers and a father, two mothers and two fathers, three mothers and a father, and even three mothers and two fathers when the biological father is not the same man as the father, and when three women participate: one gives the egg, one acts as surrogate, and one is the child's legal mother... [15]

The anthropologist is not the least bothered by this. He had a lot to say on all of these subjects because the societies he studied, though not fluent in the techniques of artificial procreation, had produced "metaphorical equivalents" [16] to handle the same problems, primarily of sterility. In a certain manner, ethnologists are the only ones not to be completely disarmed before new realities of artificial procreation that are allowed by biological science. Why? Because, Lévi-Strauss responds, the people studied by ethnologists most often separate biological paternity and social paternity, they create their own montages of paternity with a great deal of inventiveness; finally, conception and filiation are distinct, and many of these societies do not seek any truth about conception, contrary to our society that is obsessed with it. [17]

The philosopher Georgio Agamben defines "contemporary" [18] as "persistently remaining untimely, an intentional disruption from our time, having a difficult relationship with our time". The true contemporary, Agamben tells us, cannot cling to his time, nor to his values or expectations. But there is more: "The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity". [19] Agamben sees in the darkness of the present a light that seeks to reach us but does not succeed. That's why it takes courage: "it is like being on time for an appointment that one cannot but miss". Finally, the third and last feature of the contemporary: "Only he who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary". [20] Do we not recognize here the pessimistic and quixotic nature of Lévi-Strauss' relationship with time that makes his life an open book on the 20th century and many other things like our Western modernity, the immemorial, the prehistoric or the present-day?

His existential lack of propriety with his time is carried over into his anthropological structuralism through the relativist, relational, and transformational space and time of mythologies, not far from the expansion of the universe found in astrophysics and quantum physics. This earth has become a world in the second half of the twentieth century, with its generalized urbanization and its high-yield network. The first exterior views of this world were given via satellite in 1957. Since then, the "moonrises" or "earthsets" have taught us to consider it as a finished world.

All his life, Claude Lévi-Strauss dreamed of a machine that could travel through time and expand space that through his Proustian sensitiveness he found in art and in science, the only keys to real life. A few years before his death, in one of his final texts, an "Overture to UNESCO's 60th Anniversary", he astonished us once again by professing a moderated optimism and by making a theory from eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico his own: the history of human societies eternally repeats the same problems, but each period takes the same path via different routes – these "*corsi*" and "*ricorsi*" that Lévi-Strauss did not hesitate to generalize to the whole of living. This history in spirals works for him because it reconciles several regimes of historicity, linear and cyclic. The finitude and entropy of the world, its predictable uniformization, can also sometimes loosen their grasp, as shown by the short, historical parable which Claude Lévi-Strauss favoured with a certain self-indulgence. Under the impact of growing exchanges and a network of merchants and collectors, in the fourteenth century and in the first half of the next, an identified international Gothic style (deformation of the human body, overabundance of finery, morbid fascination) reigned. This "state of indistinction, far from extending, was the milieu in which the Flemish and Italian schools of painting emerged and diverged, all while keeping contact. Such are the forms most accused of diversity that occidental art has known". [21] The worst of globalization is never sure. New differentiations can emerge from uniformity. We leave Lévi-Strauss to conclude: "We say it's either or. But It is always neither". [22] The future is unpredictable because it resists all of the philosophies of history that are always revealed as false.

[1] Conference given at Columbia University, New York, Maison française, October 18, 2018, and in a few US universities for the English edition of my book *Lévi-Strauss*, London/New York, Polity Press, 2018.

[2] See *Folha do São Paulo*, October 22, 1989; «Des Indiens en pirogue sur la Seine"», *Le Havre libre*, September 28, 1989 ; «Des Indiens haïda sur la Seine. Un hommage à Lévi-Strauss, *Le Courrier de Saône-et-Loire*, October 3, 1989. An article in the French newspaper *Libération* follows the journey: Selim Nessib, «Les Haïda entrent en Seine», *Libération*, October 2, 1989.

[3] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, in Id. *Œuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 2008, p. 46.

[4] See Isac Chiva, «Une communauté de solitaires: le Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale», *Lévi-Strauss*, L'Herne, Cahiers de L'Herne, 2004, p. 66.

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, in Id. *Œuvres*, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", Gallimard, Paris, 2008, p. 568.

[6] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *De près et de loin*, Paris, Odile Jacob, "Points", Suivi d'un entretien inédit "Deux ans après", 1990, p. 195.

[7] «Sur Jean de Léry. Entretien avec Claude Lévi-Strauss».

[8] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques 3. L'origine des manières de table*, Paris, Plon, 1968, p. 422.

[9] «L'Express va plus loin avec Claude Lévi-Strauss», *L'Express*, March, 15-21, 1971.

[10] Lettre de Claude Lévi-Strauss à Raymond Aron, December 25, 1955.

[11] B. Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie moderne*, Paris, La Découverte, 1991.

[12] Cl. Lévi-Strauss, «La leçon de sagesse des vaches folles», *in Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, Paris, Seuil, 2013, p. 221.

[13] Monique Lévi-Strauss, Interview with the author, October 26, 2014.

[14] Cl. Lévi-Strauss, «La leçon de sagesse des vaches folles», *in Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, Paris, Seuil, 2013, p. 229

[15] Cl. Lévi-Strauss, «Trois grands problèmes contemporains: la sexualité, le développement économique la pensée mythique», *L'Anthropologie face aux problèmes du monde moderne*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2011, p. 64.

[16] Cl. Lévi-Strauss, «Problèmes de société: excision et procréation assistée», *L'Anthropologie face aux problèmes du monde moderne*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2011, p. 94.

[17] See also Françoise Héritier, «La cuisse de Jupiter. Réflexions sur les nouveaux modes de procréation», *L'Homme*, n° 94, April-June 1985, pp. 5-22.

[18] G. Agamben, *Qu'est-ce que le contemporain?*, Paris, Rivages poche, «Petite bibliothèque», 2008.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[21] Claude Lévi-Strauss, «Pour le 60e anniversaire de l'Unesco», *Diogène* 3/2006, n° 215, p. 6.

[22] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *De près de loin*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.