

STRUCTURALISM—SCIENCE OR IDEOLOGY

Raoul Makarius

FREAK or genius? Opinion with regard to Lévi-Strauss has wavered persistently between these two extremes. The question is personal and quite irrelevant to anthropological theory. That it is raised, however, is symptomatic of the bewilderment of those who avowedly do not understand him, when confronted with the ecstatic transports of those who professedly do. All, of course, recognize signs of intense cleverness in his writings; but cleverness, as felt by many, borders perilously on sheer artfulness.¹ It is therefore not surprising that his writings should always have been received with diffidence by British anthropologists. Obviously, before such distrust could be overcome, wide acceptance of his views, in Britain, was hardly to be expected.

For a long time, Lévi-Strauss's books were available solely in French, and thus were read only by a minority of British social anthropologists who, as Professor Leach remarks, were "put off by what may be called the oracular elegance" of his style.² Indeed, even when translated into English, passages of Lévi-Strauss "seem almost meaningless". Are they more meaningful in French? Difficulty in understanding him has been reported not only by his English readers, but by . . . Lévi-Strauss himself, when re-reading his writings.³ Yet if we are to follow Leach, the cause of the trouble is due not so much to the "verbal obscurity" surrounding the "profundity" of Lévi-Strauss's thoughts, as to the peculiar subtleties of the French tongue and the general subservience of his English readers to traditional British empiricism. If, therefore, they are uneasy and uncomfortable before a Lévi-Straussian script, the fault is all theirs (they are biased . . . their French is not up to standard etc.), and have no one but themselves to blame.

Now the interesting thing is that *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, on which Lévi-Strauss's celebrity rests, is among the least nebulous of his works. In some parts, it does indeed make very hard reading, and often when the author ought to be explicit he becomes ambiguous; but these difficulties are due to the nature of the subject, and perhaps to a certain amount of precautionary restraint exercised by the author, not to any affectation of style, or other preciousities peculiar to French. So that if that work, in spite of its much-vaunted merits, did

not meet with immediate response in Britain, the reason was not linguistic. In France it did not fare better. Serious attention was paid to it only in the mid-sixties (the book appeared in 1949), although outside of social anthropology the champions of structuralism justified their conversion to the new doctrine on the grounds that it had passed the severe test of scientific scrutiny, precisely in that discipline, and that its principles and methodology could be applied successfully in the sciences *humaines* generally. It was only after structuralism had come into fashion that the ethnologists realized that they, the most concerned, were badly out of step. Eager students and belated scholars—but also their plodding and more prudent seniors—then started discovering the hidden virtues of structural analysis, and vying with one another to bask (and shine) in the reflected light of its inventor's fame.

It was not, therefore, to his work as an anthropologist, or "scientist" that Lévi-Strauss owed his success, but to other factors, such as his merits as a writer. His one readable book, *Tristes tropiques*, published in 1955, at once commended itself to the public and won him literary fame. Unfortunately, in his other more anthropological writings, instead of drawing on his exceptional talents to elucidate complex problems, which usually defy clear formulation, he strives to achieve the opposite and perverse result of completely befuddling his reader with oblique references and unnecessary innuendo, even when dealing with plain and simple ideas. Excelling, as he does, in marshalling an imposing array of words and phrases with unshaken assurance, he contrives to create uncertainty as to the real meaning they are intended to convey (thus opening avenues of safe retreat), while at the same time implanting conviction regarding the impeccable logic by which they are ruled. In short, he has raised to a fine degree of perfection the art of saying anything and getting away with it.

Another factor which contributed to build up his reputation relates this time not to form but to content. In developing the concepts of "structure" and "structuralism" along new lines, he provided the ideological framework needed to justify the operational methods of modern processes of production and control, at a time when their alienating effects were being increasingly denounced. As an ideology ultimately consists of a distortion, if not a misrepresentation of reality, and must therefore rest on warped premises, its makers are faced with the task of giving these a deceptive appearance of verity. This they succeed in doing all the better when they share the illusions they strive to propagate. In the case of "structuralism", as a framework, or basis of ideology, formulated in terms of anthropological theory, form and content join hands in happy complicity under Lévi-Strauss. For in his case, the price of literary virtuosity is incapacity to resist its temptations and forego the delights which the production of "harmonious am-

biguities" helpfully procure.⁴ Willingly or unwillingly, as far as he is concerned, the involutions of his style, with the ambiguities they contain, dovetail, as it were, into the gaps left by inconsequential reasoning and inconsistencies. Fallacies of argument, which would stand out conspicuously in a plain and straightforward exposition of ideas, are blurred out of significance and escape detection. As ambiguities, with their magma of associated ideas, often depend on the language in which they are formulated, they are liable to disappear in translation, leaving a residual meaning manifest in all its nakedness; deformity of thought and absurdities then stand exposed. That is why passages by Lévi-Strauss appear "quite preposterous when translated into English", as Leach observes, and not because English is different from French.⁵

Lévi-Strauss's equivocations have the further advantage of allowing his readers to read different meanings in his texts; so that each, according to his particular conception of structure and structuralism, may, with a little effort, interpret his words so as to make them fit them. As curiosity about structuralism waxed, book after book appeared, purporting to explain it to the layman. Naturally, the presentation of Lévi-Strauss's ideas varied considerably from one to the other, but in most of these books, social anthropology was treated as just one discipline—albeit a privileged one—out of many, in which structuralist methodology and approach were considered operative and yielding positive results. Without realizing it, their authors were showing that structuralism represented a new development in the *ideology* of contemporary society. Obviously, structuralism could not be a new philosophy, although rooted in a certain brand of philosophical thought, since it did not set out to *interpret* or *explain* the world, but to introduce a new way of *looking* at it, and therefore ultimately of determining judgements and conduct with respect to the things of the world and society. For in spite of the different and even conflicting interpretations of structuralism given by its exponents and popularizers, there was common agreement amongst them on at least a number of its more conspicuous aspects. The ultimate reference was, of course, inevitably Lévi-Strauss, not only because he occupied the leading position in the field, but also because his discourse on the subject was flexible enough to fit into widely different interpretations.

But however elusive Lévi-Strauss may be, it is not impossible to pin him down to what one is tempted to call certain basic articles of faith, provided care is taken not to fall victim of the deceptive statements which abound in his works, nor, above all, to draw hasty conclusions from what he seems to be implying, but never commits himself to say. For instance, on the basis of oft-repeated declarations, he has been described as a Marxist, or near-Marxist; an adept of Hegelian dialectics;

a representative of the French traditional school of anthropology; a continuator of Marcel Mauss; a confirmed materialist, etc., etc., when in actual fact the full weight of his works is directed against the **marxist** interpretation of history; his criteria of reasoning are rigorously mechanistic; his anthropology is an elaboration of Robert Lowie's, with secondary borrowings right and left; while in his role as continuator of Mauss, he is so in so far as he contradicts the latter's fundamental position on the nature of social phenomena. Lastly, it is difficult to see by what standards he has been described as a materialist. ⁶

Structural Analysis and Combinatory Logic

It is possible to approach Lévi-Strauss's system of thought from various angles, precisely because it presents an appearance of logical coherence. The system cracks up and the incoherences appear when it is strained beyond breaking point to fit the facts. Before setting out to examine it, however, it is necessary to say what it is not, and remove certain initial ambiguities.

Contrary to what the word seems to imply, structuralism, as presented by Lévi-Strauss, does not propose to study social structures, or the structure of social phenomena. That was the object, in a general way, of the structuralists, properly so called, who preceded him and who, in Britain for instance, made valuable contributions to social anthropology in spite of a certain oneness due to their anti-historical bias. The terms "structuralism" and "structuralists" as currently used today must therefore be understood as broadly referring to Lévi-Strauss's school of thought and to his followers, unless the context makes it clear that it is otherwise. As used by modern structuralists, the word "structure" is applied indiscriminately to a variety of phenomena not necessarily of the same order. Sometimes it is used in the traditional, classical sense; sometimes it refers to "mental structures", or "structures of the unconscious", not in the Freudian, or even general psychological sense, but in a sense left to the reader's better judgement to decide. At other times it refers to what some authors regard more properly as ideal models of social phenomena. Lévi-Strauss sometimes uses the term as though it referred not even to such models, but to a logically interlocking set of rules capable of manifesting themselves empirically, but not necessarily doing so. So that, in fine, while social phenomena are viewed as made up of component elements, it is not the structure of these phenomena which the structuralist studies, but what he regards as the rules whereby their component parts may or may not be joined together.

That a social phenomenon is a whole embracing the totality of its parts is, of course, a tautology. That it may be studied and therefore understood in terms of the rules governing the relations among its parts,

follows logically enough, and to some will commend itself as methodologically economical and advantageous, since the results of a study of rules and relationships, necessarily carried on an abstract level, will be comprehensive in its scope and apply to the various individual manifestations of the phenomenon concerned. To many, however, this approach will appear dangerous and unreliable precisely because carried on at an abstract level; for however carefully concrete facts are translated into abstract language, there can never be any certainty that elements of meaning foreign to the former will not slip inadvertently into the latter.

At first sight, the difference between the study of a social phenomenon in its abstract expression to grasp its significance directly at that level, and the empirical and comparative examination of the various particular forms which it assumes in the world of reality in order to draw generalizations from that basis, may seem to be simply a difference of method; and indeed structuralists often insist that structuralism is not a doctrine or philosophy, but simply and quite modestly a method. However, it is more than that, and would have scarcely provoked wide discussion if it had not been.

Now, if a given phenomenon is the sum (or more) of its component parts, this is proof that these parts are capable of combining to form a whole. But what if these same parts, or elements as we shall call them, are combined differently? If the order or conditions under which they combine are relevant, each new combination will produce theoretically a new form or variety of the phenomenon under study. Thus, given a certain number of elements, it will be possible to work out mathematically the total number of combinations into which they may enter, and therefore the number of distinct forms in which the phenomenon concerned may manifest itself. In these conditions, quite a small number of elements will suffice to account for a relatively considerable sum of combinations. In many, if not in most cases, however, it will happen that owing to the properties of these elements, or to other factors, a large number of combinations will be ruled out, leaving a really very limited number that can be easily dealt with conceptually.

Suppose, by way of illustration, we consider "first cousin marriage". Each marriage will consist of a combination of two *cousins* (elements) of *opposite* sexes. Now, the different mathematically possible combinations between two cousins, *irrespective* of sex, are those between

- 1) two sons of two brothers
- 2) two daughters of two brothers
- 3) a son and a daughter of two brothers
- 4) two sons of two sisters
- 5) two daughters of two sisters
- 6) a son and a daughter of two sisters

- 7) two sons of a brother and sister
- 8) two daughters of a brother and sister
- 9) a son and a daughter of a brother and sister

The total number of possible combinations is thus nine. However, out of these nine combinations, only a third, or three, are between cousins of opposite sexes and therefore marriageable, representing the different possible types of first cousin marriage. The other six are ruled out.

This by way of example to illustrate one type of structural analysis, Structuralism, of course, does not stop at this level of simplicity. In the case of cousin marriage, which presents no mystery, the analysis would be pointless. It is otherwise when the object to be analysed is not clearly understood, for then the purpose of the analysis is to make it comprehensible. A case in point is that of totemism, where on the basis of the analysis made, far-reaching conclusions have been drawn concerning the nature of the phenomenon.

Totemism refers to a peculiar association, in most cases between the animal world and the world of man, familiar to field-workers, who have described it with a wealth of details, both as a system of social organization and a system of beliefs. When examined "structurally", all of its sociological manifestations are ignored, as though inexistent, and only its formal, external aspect is considered in terms of *mechanical* relations between two *distinct* abstract concepts: the "collective" and the "individual". These are supposed to be the "elements" to which both the animal world and the world of humans may be reduced, and which through their combinations in all the mathematically possible ways, construct so many different types of totemism. The resulting combinations are four in number, giving four types of totemism:

- 1) between animals as a *collective* entity (a species) and humans as a *collective* entity (a clan)
- 2) between animals as a *collective* entity (a species) and a human as an *individual* entity (a particular person)
- 3) between an animal as an *individual* entity (a particular animal) and humans as a *collective* entity (a clan)
- 4) between an animal as an *individual* entity (a particular animal) and a human as an *individual* entity (a particular person)

Every known case of **totemism** should fall under one of these four categories, since they logically exhaust all possible combinations, provided, of course, that the basic assumption is correct, namely that the phenomenon in its total manifestations is composed of the different combinations of the elements mentioned above.

Now, as long as the phenomenon itself (totemism) is very imperfectly understood, there can be no decisive way of determining whether

or not the exhaustive classification proposed according to the criteria postulated (individual and collective entities) is not after all purely arbitrary and the result of clever manipulation. Lévi-Strauss, who is the author of the classification, claims that the examples which he adduces to illustrate the four categories thus defined, represent genuine examples of **totemism** as commonly, though very imperfectly understood.⁷ Yet his claim, precisely because **totemism** is imperfectly understood, is open to challenge on perhaps more valid grounds than those on which he substantiates it. Be that as it may, the weakness in his interpretation is that with regard to at least two of the four categories concerned, known cases of **totemism** are extremely rare. We shall see presently how he meets this objection. Assuming, for the present, that the four categories are correctly defined, recognition of the fact does not in any case reveal the nature and significance of totemism, although it does enable us to view it from a new angle.

In the case of structural analysis applied to totemism, it stops short (at least in Lévi-Strauss's book on the subject) of a further development which he carries out sometimes in the case of kinship systems and myths. In the case of totemism, two binary oppositions are clearly perceptible, though not designated as such: one between "individual" and "collective" entities in the case of animals, and another in the case of humans, not to speak of a third opposition between the animal world and the world of humans.

In the case of cousin marriage, we also come up against binary oppositions. Proceeding a step further in the analysis, we find that marriage between a son and a daughter of a brother and sister (type 9) may be of two kinds, either marriage of the son of a brother to the daughter of his sister, or marriage of the daughter of a brother to the son of his sister. We thus obtain four types of cousin marriage in all and not three. These represent two binary oppositions, first that between marriage of the children of two brothers and marriage of the children of two sisters; and second that between the two kinds of marriage described above. These two binary oppositions, being opposed to each other, may also be said to represent a third opposition at a higher level, namely that between marriage of cousins whose related parents are of the same sex, and marriage of cousins whose related parents are of opposite sexes.

The final purpose of structural analysis is to show that all forms of social **thinking** (ex. in myth) and social behaviour (ex. in kinship systems, ritual etc.) are ultimately so many different types of combination of binary oppositions. For if so, then the reason must be that they borrow their structure from the same source, namely the human mind. In other words, binary oppositions represent a structure or matrix of the mind, so that all **thinking** that filters through it is moulded or structured

accordingly. As all behaviour is operated by the mind, any fixed pattern of behaviour must reproduce its binary structure.

When applying structural analysis to myth, Lévi-Strauss proceeds in a variety of ways. In analysing the Oedipus myth, for instance, he finds on examination that according to the story⁸ .

- 1) Cadmus sets out in search of his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus;
- 2) Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta;
- 3) **Antigone** buries her brother, Polynices, although this is not allowed.

He also finds that

- 1) the Spartoi annihilate one another;
- 2) Oedipus kills his father, Laius;
- 3) Eteocles **kills** his brother, Polynices.

These two series of events are part of the story told by the myth. Through a process of abstraction, they are raised to a higher level of generality and each series is shown to carry the same general meaning. We thus obtain two generalizations that are then said to form a binary opposition. Thus, each of the three events in the first series "concern blood relations, whose relations of proximity are so to speak exaggerated; these relatives are made to manifest behaviour of greater intimacy than countenanced by social rules". They represent "overrated kinship relations". Conversely, the second series, where in each case a blood relative or more are killed, concerns once again blood relations, but this time carrying the opposite sign. They represent "underrated kinship relations". In the first series exaggerated solicitude is displayed between blood-relations, in the second exaggerated repulsion. Thus six episodes belonging to the myth are shown to represent a binary opposition. It is unnecessary to comment here on the highly fanciful way in which a brother looking for his sister is viewed as exhibiting overrated kinship relations, and a massacre is given as an example of underrated relations. According to structuralist theory, all the events recounted in the myth may be resolved in this way into binary oppositions.

The difficulty in subjecting myth to such treatment lies in first successfully aligning a number of items and showing that through some common trait, detected by the analyst, they may be regarded as a single component "element" of the myth; of doing the same with another series of items, and then showing that the resulting pair of "elements" are in some way contrary to each other and therefore form a binary opposition.

With a little imagination, the analyst will always get out of any difficulty. If, for instance, in a given myth mentioning a coyote, a mist, scalps, clothes and ashes, he wishes to show that all these items refer

to one and the same thing and represent the same "element", he will say that the "coyote (which feeds on carrion) is intermediate between grass-eating and flesh-eating animals, in the same way as a mist is intermediate between heaven and earth, a scalp is, between warfare and agriculture (a scalp is a war 'crop') . . . clothes, between 'nature' and 'culture' . . . ashes, between the hearth (on the ground) and the roof (image of the heavenly vault)".⁹ In other words, by showing that they display a common trait (in this case, occupying an intermediate position), different items (objects or acts) mentioned in a myth may be said to be mere repetitions or expressions of the same basic element or component part. However, as any two objects may always be shown to possess a trait in common, the method as a "method" turns into a caricature of itself. All objects may be regarded as occupying intermediate positions, because every object is in an intermediate position between two other objects, physically if not metaphorically. That would be too ridiculously simple, and Lévi-Strauss usually looks for more sophisticated "common traits" and devotes much space to trace (or invent) the tortuous routes which would presumably link up together various mythical facts, or items, or themes, in order to show that they are equivalent and fill the same structural function in myth.

When we come to the next step in the structural analysis of myth, reliance on purely subjective and arbitrary judgements becomes still more evident. The first step, as we saw, consisted in bringing together several items of a myth under a single abstract formula. The second consists in finding which pairs of such formulations stand in binary opposition to each other. In practice, the two steps go together, with the imaginative operator juggling with the items provided by a myth until he finds a number of them which, to his mind, may be fitted into one or other of two opposite formulas. In some cases, the first step may simply be omitted, as when these items are strung together along two lines and paired off in couples of opposites.

Thus, to analyse mythical thinking, Lévi-Strauss on one occasion examines two groups of myths, each group consisting of versions of the same myth. All these variations are thus reduced to two basic myths which, he tells us, are opposite to each other. To demonstrate this he summarizes the story told by each myth in his own words, and sets forth each summary in the form of a series of sentences, each sentence in each series corresponding to one in the other, but with the opposite meaning.¹⁰ Thus, the opening sentence in one myth, namely: "A step-brother (affine), irritated by a boy, abandons him *definitely*, so he believes", is opposed to the following in another: "A mother (kin), irritated by a girl, abandons her temporarily, so she believes". Step-brother and mother, boy and girl, and *definitely* and temporarily are thus

opposite pairs, and each sentence is the inverted image of the other. The stories contained in the two myths are recounted in this way till the end, and the analysis is then completed.

The arbitrary character of this procedure is self-evident. A number of facts are picked up from two myths, while other facts, deemed irrelevant, are ignored. Then the facts selected are lined up opposite to each other and worded in such a way as to show oppositions between the two. If a different selection of facts is made, the general pattern of the myths and the oppositions that will emerge will obviously be different.¹¹

Now, **Lévi-Strauss** need not necessarily deny the arbitrary nature of such analysis. It would be quite sufficient for his purpose, as we shall see, to show that in some way or other, myths are made up of combinations of binary oppositions, and mythical thinking the process of combining such oppositions. The important thing is to show that a piece of mythical **thinking** may be thus split up into constituent oppositions, whether the ones he points out in a given instance are the real ones or not. If they are, so much the better; if not . . . "so what?" For instance, "it amounts to the same thing", he says, "whether the thinking of South-American Indians takes shape when my thinking operates on it, or when their thinking operates on **mine**".¹² The important thing is that irrespective of what the **thinking** is about, it is constructed by means of binary oppositions.

Anthropologists, however, cannot be satisfied with a method of investigation whose purpose is not really to shed light on the significance of the phenomenon analysed, but simply to demonstrate that it is structured on the basis of binary oppositions whatever their meaning. Nevertheless following **Lévi-Strauss's** lead, quite a number of anthropologists in France, Britain and elsewhere, working mainly in the field of myth and ritual, have undertaken, at the cost of great painstaking effort, to show that this or that set of ritualized practices, or mythical representations may be ordered in such a way as to reveal series of combinations of binary oppositions. Quite apart from the fact that the results obtained are always exposed to the charge of being at bottom arbitrary and the fruit of the operator's imagination (as some have been shown to be), they are inevitably bound to prove barren and disappointing, since they add nothing to our knowledge of the object analysed, nor are they intended to. The novelty of structuralist analysis made it attractive for a while, and in the process of analysing a myth, interesting and suggestive aspects relative to its meaning could reveal themselves; but that would be incidental to the final purpose of the analysis which is to reach the ultimate stage where all that remains of the myth, after successive abstractions have been made, are binary oppositions between ~~plus~~ and **minus** signs—abstract units devoid of

factual meaning. In short, when structural analysis expresses its full meaning as a method, it is meaningless in its results.

Structural Analysis and Marxist Interpretation

In *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* kinship systems are represented as so many modes of effecting an exchange of women between different groups. Through the marriage of a man and a woman, the group to which the former belongs is "wife-taker" as opposed to the woman's group, which is "wife-giver". In its turn, the "wife-taker" group becomes "wife-giver" relatively to the other, which then becomes "wife-taker". Thus, an exchange of women takes place between the two groups whereby each is alternately "wife-taker" and "wife-giver", while the other is "wife-giver" and "wife-taker". (The situation is more complicated, but the principle of exchange is maintained when group A gives its women to group B, group B to group C, and group C to group A.) From the structuralist point of view, exchange is not the result of marriage, but its condition. In marrying a woman, a man "takes" a woman. Owing to the binary structure of his mind, the act of taking cannot be separated from the opposite one of giving. This opposition rises to consciousness in the form of the "notion of reciprocity" described by Lévi-Strauss as a structure of the mind; so that the act of taking a woman is felt as having to be "reciprocated" by that of giving another in exchange.

Reasoning along these lines, Lévi-Strauss comes to advance a peculiar theory to account for the prohibition of incest, a phenomenon of universal application that has been the subject of considerable discussion in anthropological literature. In the absence of such a prohibition, a man would be allowed to marry a woman of his own group, a kinswoman, a sister. From the point of view of the group, no woman would have to be "given" to an outsider in order to "take" one from outside. The individual marrying a woman (a sister) in his group would be "taking" a woman without his group's "giving" any woman away. The "notion of reciprocity" would thus be balked and, in practice, marriage and the family would be meaningless. In seeking to fulfil itself, the "notion of reciprocity" brings into being the rule prohibiting incest, that is forbidding marriage with women of one's group. All existing women are thus divided between the forbidden women of one's group, and the permitted women of other groups, so that the latter may be "taken" only by "giving" the former in exchange. The exchange between two groups exhibits on the social level the result of the binary opposition structured in the mind. This opposition expresses itself in consciousness as the "notion of reciprocity" which is thus itself, as Lévi-Strauss says, a structure of the mind. In practice, it expresses itself in exchange—a form of communication—and in

marriage, the opposites are two groups whose oppositeness results from the prohibition of incest that marks their women with opposite signs relatively to each group, and renders their exchange possible between the two groups.

As an outer expression of inner binary oppositions, exchange is fundamental for Lévi-Strauss, and not only for exchanging women. Anthropological evidence, however, points the other way and indicates that it is secondary in relation to social requirements. The prohibition of incest, of marriage within the kin-group, by obliging its male and female members to seek wives and husbands in other groups, leads automatically to what has the appearance of a deliberate exchange of women (or of men). That marriage eventually is viewed as such, and women are equated to merchandise, is a subsequent development, and it is that development which gives rise to the notion of reciprocity and not *vice versa*. Lévi-Strauss's chain of reasoning from mental structures to a notion of reciprocity, to the emergence of the prohibition of incest as a rule governing marriage, to the resulting *exchange* of women, to human marriage rests on no evidence whatever, is not even expressible hypothetically in terms of psychological or physiological processes, and finally stems from a purely imaginary assumption (not unrelated however to a philosophical view-point). This assumption leads him to contend that the sudden appearance of the incest prohibition in a non-human mind made it just as suddenly human, marked the passage from "nature" to "culture", or rather *was* that passage, made marriage possible, nay inevitable, instituted the family and started the whole historical process going.

The bulk of *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* is devoted to a demonstration that certain highly complex, exceptional and still unaccountable systems of kinship are really particular cases of the exchange of women. To do this, Lévi-Strauss does not attempt to trace their development from simpler or better understood systems, not on the grounds that such a historical reconstruction is well-nigh impossible, but because in his view kinship systems are not determined by any process of historical development. Given the particularities of local conditions and other *contingent* factors, the unconscious structures of the mind, with their matrix of binary oppositions, elaborate kinship systems that will meet these conditions; while fulfilling the requirements of exchange, the prohibition of incest and the notion of reciprocity.

It is here that Lévi-Strauss strikes at the root of the *marxist* interpretation of history and sets out to discredit it. His attempt has been hailed by Nur Yalman, an American anthropologist, as "a superb attack . . . against the *marxist position*".¹³ It marks, in fact, a new departure in that discipline—anticipated by Robert Lowie, it is true—

in that the attack is "theorized" for the first time, whereas until now, Marxism was combated indirectly. As Yalman further points out; "We can now more clearly understand that Ltví-Strauss's encyclopedic examination of cross-cousin marriage was really undertaken to undermine the assumptions of materialist anthropology." Things could hardly be stated more plainly and acquire added significance when made by a non-Marxist. Among intellectuals of the Left, Lévi-Strauss's anti-historicism and references to unconscious structures of the mind called forth some reservations and caused uneasiness, but all that was quickly explained away as inevitable lapses into idealism by a bourgeois writer who, at any rate, had expressed admiration and approval, though distant, of marxist thought. The temptation was too great not to represent him as a fellow-traveller and share in the prestige he enjoyed. Books and articles appeared, reconciling marxism and structuralism, demonstrating their complementarity, and even suggesting that Marx's method, after all, was really structuralist. After 1968, and except for the Althusserians, the popularity of structuralism among the left declined steadily for a variety of reasons: its barrenness as a method in anthropology; increased criticism of Ltví-Strauss's work on technical grounds; increased awareness—though hazy—that structuralism with its emphasis on "synchrony" was more conservative than progressive etc.; but its profoundly reactionary character and the ideology and theoretical premises from which it stems were not yet fully apprehended.

In Ltví-Strauss's view, then, if kinship systems, myths, ritual and even odd unsystematized practices and beliefs, as manifested at different periods in history and in different parts of the world, are similar in essence, the reason is that everywhere and at all times the binary oppositions in the human mind are at work. Social phenomena are not to be regarded as products of historical processes, subject to the maturation of the appropriate material conditions and governed by laws of development. His standpoint thus offers the very appreciable advantage of relieving social scientists of the formidable *problématique* which constantly dogs their footsteps, namely that of accounting for the facts they study by tracing their development to historical antecedents. The search for historical causality is eliminated at a stroke. Henceforth, they may dismiss such concern with a light heart: social facts are determined by structures of the mind, and all that remains to be done is to identify the pattern of symmetries and oppositions that underlies them.

Such an impoverishment of scientific research is not presented by Ltví-Strauss as a theoretical imperative of structuralism, for that would bring upon it immediate discredit, but as a practical necessity imposed by the limitations of science itself. To the question "Why are societies structured differently?" his reply is not that they are not structured differently in essence; on the contrary, it is that such questions "are

most relevant, and we should welcome the possibility of answering them. In the present state of knowledge, we can consider ourselves in a position to do so only with respect to precise and limited cases".¹⁴ This expression of scientific modesty is such as to disarm the critic and at the same time to mislead him completely as to the real implications of structuralism. The question of why, for instance, do kinship systems differ so much from one another, is never answered squarely, it being given to be understood that the question betrays incredible naivety. Outward circumstances and events, as so many contingent forces, come into play and affect the way in which the ubiquitous unconscious structures of the mind will project themselves outwardly, and that is all. Yet it is precisely this area of reality, which supposedly belongs to the realm of contingency and historical hazard, that Marxism, and not only Marxism, regard as the area where historical necessity reveals itself as governed by laws of development that account for the appearance of social institutions and explain their sociological significance.

As a doctrine purporting to interpret social facts not in terms of their development, but in terms of mental structures—f accounting in anthropology for, say, the prohibition of incest in terms of these same structures and not of the material conditions that imposed it etc., structuralism will have to face the test of time as any other doctrine. It is in its pernicious effects in the field of anthropological research and ideology that its reactionary nature becomes manifest.

The Linguistics Fallacy

Its effect in anthropology is the systematic destruction of anthropological facts. This follows from its basic premises and is substantiated in practice by the successive positions taken by structuralists on various theoretical questions. By destruction of anthropological facts is meant the denial that they possess specifically intrinsic and objective meaning in respect to primitive societies. The reduction of anthropological facts by structural analysis to pure, abstract logical oppositions strips them of their specificity, and their ascription to properties of the mind deprives them of objective basis. In practice, the destruction of facts proceeds piecemeal at the hands of structuralists who are seldom aware of the implications of what they are doing.

Lévi-Strauss's reductionism with regard to social facts is achieved *via* linguistics, linguistics providing him with a ready-made model, logical and coherent, on which to operate. Studied structurally as a system of signs devoid of intrinsic meaning, language reveals the underlying logical network of relationships which structuralism in anthropology would fain extricate from the disorder of social facts. In this respect, structuralism is said to lag far behind linguistics, the system of relationships underlying social facts being in no way as easily

discernible. Linguistics is supposed to prove that what matters is not so much the facts (signs) of language as the system of relations binding them. Structuralism adopts this view with regard to social facts, and leans heavily on linguistics to justify it.

What all this really boils down to is that linguistics shows that it is possible to study a system of relations independently of the terms which these relations bind together. The terms are said to be devoid of intrinsic meaning, their position in the system of relations, only, giving them meaning. The same is supposed to apply to social facts. It is the system of relationships to which they belong that gives them meaning, according to their position in that system, and it is therefore the system which constitutes the proper subject of study, and not whatever meaning comes to be derivatively attached to the facts. Again, just as the structure of a language is not apprehended by its users, but is situated at the level of the unconscious, so also the structure of social systems (of thought or behaviour) is rooted in the unconscious part of the mind, that is in the binary oppositions of the unconscious. Linguistics offers the model for the reduction of observable facts to the invisible **oppositions** of the mind.

It has been said that tragedy is a beautiful deduction killed by an ugly fact. The ugly fact in Ltví-Strauss's "**deduction**" is that social phenomena, unlike linguistic signs, do possess intrinsic meaning and are rich in sociological content, independently of their position in a system of relationships, although they are not unaffected by it. Analogies between linguistic and social phenomena may be made, provided the essential difference that separates them is borne in mind. Ltví-Strauss remembers it sometimes. He points out, for instance, in the case of kinship systems, that while women are signs, like words, they are also **producers** of words; "therefore, they cannot be reduced to the condition of symbols or mere **tokens**".¹⁵ However, it seems that the recognition of this difference between women, in their social function, and words, is made, in the present case, in anticipation of the objection that will arise when he **does** not choose to **recognize** it, in **order** to remove that objection beforehand. Thus, although **women cannot** be reduced to the condition of symbols, yet kinship systems, he claims, "because they are systems of symbols, open up to anthropology a privileged terrain on which its endeavours **may** almost (and we insist on the word 'almost') join with that most developed of all the social sciences, namely **linguistics**".¹⁶ Furthermore, "a system of kinship is a language", and "in another order of reality, kinship phenomena are of the same type as linguistic phenomena". The parallelism between the world of social facts and the world of words is drawn so tight, in spite of the insistence on the word "almost", that the essential difference between the two is simply smothered out of existence.

This is particularly evident in Lévi-Strauss's treatment of myth. Here again, the same precautions are taken, and he is at pains to explain that myth is not to be identified with language. It turns out, however, that the difference between the two does not bear on their essence. We are told, in a summary to a long disquisition on the subject, that (A) if a myth has any meaning, it is derived from the way its constituent parts are combined together (a fundamental tenet of structuralism, applied not only to myth, as we saw); (B) myths belong to the same order of phenomena as language, they are an integral part of language, although language as used in myth possesses specific properties; (C) these properties of language manifest themselves at a high level of expression and are of a more complex nature than usually met with.¹⁷

The essential difference between language and myth having thus been "abstracted" away, the one may now be reduced to the other without much difficulty. How this reduction is effected is summarily stated under (A), above. The assertion made there is of paramount importance for the structuralist position, because its validity is made to rest upon it. Untenable, gratuitous and unsupported by any evidence, as they may be, the basic assumptions of structuralism (as relative to the binary oppositions of the mind, their role in determining social structure etc), may be legitimately advanced, though with less pretentiousness, as hypotheses to be verified subsequently. The reduction of social phenomena to binary mental structures *via* linguistics (on the far from acceptable supposition that language is thus also reducible) is supposed to be demonstrated in the case of myth, and so confirming the validity of the hypotheses made. The demonstration is crucial for structuralism, and therefore deserves some attention.

First of all, it purports to show that "in accord with modern linguistics . . . content [of myth] never has a meaning in itself. . . it is only the way in which the different elements of the content are combined together which gives a meaning".¹⁸ Now linguistics, we are told, teaches that when taken separately, phonemes have no meaning, but when combined to form words, they have. What Lévi-Strauss omits to say is that it is for this reason that the meaning of words is arbitrary. It is otherwise when we come to myths. The elements that go to form a myth carry an intrinsic meaning of their own. Combined in the myth, they acquire a new, different meaning, but this meaning is determined by their individual intrinsic meanings. It is therefore not arbitrary. The same applies to social facts when combined. It is to linguistics that it does not always apply.

The analogy drawn between myth and language easily leads to confusion, because myth, like language, consists in conveying a message, and like language also, does so by means of words. Whence the wrong

conclusion that as in the case in linguistics, "meaning cannot depend on the separate elements which enter into their composition, but on the way they are combined".¹⁹

If, however, myths are not to be confused with language, then their meaning will not depend exclusively on the way their elements are combined, but also on the separate meaning of each. If it is true that a myth, like language, conveys meaning by the use of words, its meaning however is not the textual one given by the story it tells in words. The story is symbolical and contains a message to be unravelled when its symbolism is deciphered. Furthermore, it acquires its global symbolical meaning from both the symbolical meaning of each of the events it relates, as from the way they are combined. Lévi-Strauss takes advantage of the fact that when this symbolism is not understood, the myth appears as a meaningless tissue of incoherence and often of nonsense—so that "anything may happen in a myth", he thinks²⁰—to claim this as proof that its component parts are themselves devoid of meaning. Actually the argument turns against him. For if a myth, when not understood, may seem nonsensical, it is not at all because the separate events which make it up are so, but because their combination is—exactly the opposite of what Lévi-Strauss contends.

According to him, a myth, like language, is made up of constituent elements, to be called *mythèmes*, and which play the same role in myth as *phonèmes* in language. They differ however from phonemes, as he admits, in that they are already loaded with meaning at the level of language expressed in words. They are words, "but words with a double meaning: words of words, which work on two levels, that of language when they continue to have meaning each on its own, and that of meta-language (myth) when they intervene as elements endowed with the super-meaning which their union produces".²¹

Except for the last end of phrase, this passage expresses in characteristically unsimple language what was stated just before. For if it can be suggested that myth is a meta-language, it is because while in language a sign (word) refers to its meaning, in myth this meaning refers in turn to what it symbolizes, namely the hidden meaning of the myth which makes of it a myth and not the amusing or horrifying or nonsensical story it tells. It does not follow however from the relation between meta-language and language that the *mythèmes* in myth have the same characteristics as the phonemes in words, that although loaded with meaning they play the same role as phonemes which possess none. Lévi-Strauss does not ask himself whether the meaning with which he says they are loaded does not play a part in determining the meaning of the myth. This leads him into a fallacious reasoning and a wrong analysis. A fallacious reasoning, because if phonemes play no part in determining the meaning of the words they form, it does not follow that

mythemes, which possess meaning, do not in the myths they build up; and a wrong **analysis**, because, as a matter not of inference but of fact, neither in myth nor in language is meaning engendered exclusively by the combination of their constituent elements. In the case of words, these elements or phonemes, combine sounds which then receive a meaning extrinsic to them. That is why the same combination of sounds have different meanings in different languages (and often even in the same language). In the case of myth, the combination of **mythemes** will engender a new meaning, the meaning of the myth, but this meaning will arise from within and will depend on the individual meanings of the constituent mythemes. That is why also, in opposition to a combination of phonemes, they cannot have different meanings in different languages.

The truth therefore is exactly the opposite of what Lévi-Strauss supposes. It is because phonemes are devoid of meaning that the meaning of words is arbitrary—in fact, has to be; and it is because **mythemes** have meaning that the meaning of a myth is not arbitrary, so that not "anything may happen in a myth". Nor is this all. Lévi-Strauss's purpose in assimilating **mythemes** to phonemes really defeats itself on another level also. For mythemes are identified **by** their meaning. To be fitted into a matrix of binary oppositions, they have to convey opposite meanings. If in the process of abstraction, which aims at reducing them to their simplest expression, as abstract units, marked only with *plus* and *minus* signs, their meaning is eliminated, they disappear altogether, leaving nothing behind, no residual units on which to pin *plus* and *minus* signs. (In the case of the opposition man/woman, for instance, these two terms when divested, conceptually, of specific sexual connotations, subsist, at a higher level of abstraction, as "human beings", capable of being marked with opposite signs standing for the sexual attributes that have disappeared. But then the opposition between man and woman is real (**and not** only in so far as the binary oppositions of the mind conceive it to be so).)

The argument from linguistics is intended to demonstrate the validity of structural analysis. If it is grounded in fallacy, the entire theoretical justification of the latter collapses.

Reductionism and Computer-logic

To give credibility to structuralist reductionism on the model of linguistics ("language may be regarded as a foundation destined to receive structures which sometimes surpass it in complexity, but which are of the same type as its own, and which correspond to culture when viewed under various aspects")²² Lévi-Strauss points out that "marriage and kinship rules serve to ensure the communication of women between groups, just as economic rules serve to ensure the communication of

goods and services, and linguistic rules the communication of messages. These three forms of communication are at the same time forms of exchange^{H²³} (and exchange, as we have seen, is motivated by the notion of reciprocity due to the binary oppositions of the mind). If these types of communication differ from one another, it is with regard to "the strategic level" at which they operate. "They are not of the same dimension".²⁴

The word "communication", here, should cause no worry. In ordinary speech it carries so many associations that it meets admirably the conditions of ambiguity, for although it has a different sense according as to whether it is applied to **words**, **women** or **goods**, it verbally ties them all together to any concept that might be associated to it in some way, to exchange, for instance, or to the general theory of communication itself. The recourse to this theory, for instance, is very helpful for it provides a material, functioning model of reductionism as structuralism conceives it. This model is the digital computer which handles information that has been broken down into binary oppositions. It should afford experimental proof that social facts are reducible to binary oppositions. All that remains to be done is to show that these facts are facts of communication.

Now this can be easily shown by straining somewhat the meaning of the word "communication". A body moving from point A to point B may be said to represent a form of communication. It is itself communicated from A to B, and through it they are put in communication and communicate. But if so, it is not even necessary for it to *move* from A to B. It is enough that it should lie between them, occupying an intermediate position, joining (or separating) them. We saw earlier that a coyote, a mist, a scalp, clothes and ashes also occupy intermediate positions, so that they also may be said to provide communication between grass-eaters and flesh-eaters, heaven and earth, warfare and agriculture, "nature" and "culture", the hearth and the roof, respectively. Since every existing (or even imaginary) object occupies some intermediate position (spatial or metaphorical), all objects are elements of some system of communication.

This, of course, we knew all the time, and is what enables a computer to handle information. For **Lévi-Strauss**, the analogy with the computer also offers the advantage of both simplicity and sophistication, in addition to being fashionable and modernistic, etc. On the other hand, it shows that structural analysis **really** consists in the translation of a set of observed facts, understood or not, into another language **not understood** this time — comparable to a code — just as the information to be fed into the computer has to be translated through a series of languages before it can be digested by it. Once the facts have been finally put into the same code, it becomes possible to combine them at will.

It is this avowed aim to codify social facts that betrays the ideological, mystificatory character of structuralism, since the purpose is to reduce little understood facts to still less understandable language, if understandable at all. By divesting social facts of their empirical qualities, in order to codify them in simpler terms, structural analysis effaces all traces of their interconnections with the material world surrounding them. At that level of abstraction, they cannot be studied in terms of the specific causes that gave rise to them, because causal relations are no longer visible. Instead of being a method opening new ways of approach to an understanding of social phenomena, structural analysis actually eliminates those available.

Having reduced a set of social facts to their component elements, structuralism proceeds to combine these in all the mathematically possible ways. One or more of these combinations will reconstitute the original set of facts; but the remaining will represent all the possible variations of these facts, existing but having escaped detection, or simply inextant.²⁵ In the latter case, their absence will have to be accounted for, unless reasonably imputable to contingent influences.

By way of example, Lévi-Strauss refers to a form of marriage known as the crow-omaha system. In this system the number of different marriage combinations possible is so high that he turned to "mathematicians to translate, so to speak, the crow-omaha system in terms of elementary structures."²⁶ The results showed that in the case of intermarriage between, say, seven clans, the number of possible combinations was 23,436. In the case of 30 clans, the number was no less than 297,423,855.

A much more manageable result was obtained in the case of totemism. Here we saw that the number of different combinations possible between animals and humans, in terms of binary oppositions, was four, alleged to represent four types of totemism. "Logically speaking", says Lévi-Strauss, "the four combinations are equivalent, since they are produced by the same operation".²⁷ We should therefore expect to find that, on the whole, the four types are more or less represented in equal numbers. The trouble is that they are very far from being so. By and large, the majority of known cases of totemism come under one (or two) only of Lévi-Strauss's four divisions. Before Lévi-Strauss, totemism was regarded as the result of a process of development, and the relatively rare and doubtful examples, which Lévi-Strauss would class under the minority types, were taken to represent either early phases, or vestiges of totemism.

Lévi-Strauss will have none of this. For if totemism were a social phenomenon possessing objective reality (that is meaning) then indeed it would have to be regarded as a product of historical development, passing through successive stages, accountable in terms of its develop-

ment and inaccessible to structural analysis. To be reduced to the binary oppositions of mental structures, the objectivity of totemic phenomena had to be shown to be illusory, they had to be disconnected, as it were, from their relationships with other social phenomena, and shown to be the product of the inner workings of the mind and not of any sociological process. On this view, what goes by the name of **totemism** manifests itself whenever the binary structures of the mind are capable of expressing themselves accordingly, each reported case of **totemism** being therefore a projection of the mind. On this view also, **totemism** should be represented equally in the four types defined. If it is not, that is because by some perverse twist of the anthropological mind, the "semantic field" to which **totemism** belongs has been "distorted", so as to mark out certain of its aspects "at the expense of others, in order to endow them with an originality and oddity intrinsically foreign to them. They are thus made to appear mysterious by the mere fact that they are excluded from the system of which they form an integral part and constitute so many transformations."²⁸ In other words, pre-LCvi-Straussian anthropologists had narrowed down the term "**totemism**" deliberately, so as to leave out a number of totemic phenomena and make them look mysterious and fascinating. As to their insistence on regarding **totemism** as a real phenomenon, characteristic of primitive society, it is due to "a certain taste for the obscene and the grotesque" on their part.²⁹

Lévi-Strauss, as stated earlier, has developed the art of saying anything and getting away with it; and here we have a typical, though at the same time exceptional example of his proficiency in the art. For surely, it is a rarity in scientific literature for an author to charge practically all his predecessors with the "distortion" of what he calls the "semantic field" to which the phenomenon under study belongs, out of an erratic desire to endow them with an exotic fascination of some sort. What defies explanation is that such reputed anthropologists as Leach and Needham, though visibly enraptured by Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, should nevertheless condone, by their silence, such an expression of declared contempt for earlier anthropologists. No one, after all, as much as Leach has so admiringly expatiated on the virtues of Lévi-Strauss's anthropology; while Needham is none other than the translator of his book on totemism. Both of them having "worked" on that book, it is incredible that both, so critical in other circumstances and with other authors, should prove so insensitive to Lévi-Strauss's reflections on the alleged mental aberrations of his predecessors. Equally incredible, in this context, is the fact that they should have had nothing to say regarding the flagrant misquotations and unabashed garbling of clear and unambiguous statements (by Tylor, Radcliffe-Brown, Boas, Radin, Durkheim and Mauss) appearing

in the same and other books.³⁰ Such practices, that would earn a schoolboy a severe rapping on the fingers, are highly prejudicial to social science when committed by a leading figure in the field, and yet the veil of discretion that covers them is securely maintained.

The structuralist treatment of **totemism** is revelatory. The purpose is to deny its objective nature as a social fact, reduce it to a subjective manifestation of the mind (its objectivity is therefore illusory) and trace its origin conceptually to the binary oppositions in the unconscious. If when the phenomenon comes to be reconstructed by the combination of opposites, the results as we saw, are not borne out by the facts, the fault is with those anthropologists who, until Lkvi-Strauss, were motivated by all sorts of intentions and morbid tastes etc.

The Strategy of Structuralism and its Critique

Social phenomena may be classed under several heads. Lkvi-Strauss has dealt mainly with myths, **kinship** and totemism. The first problem in each case consisted of translating the facts into a language visibly made up of oppositions. The justification for so doing was that these oppositions emanated from the unconscious structures of the mind. In this enterprise, **Lévi-Strauss** thought that the field of myths would prove the rewarding one to explore, since myths have to obey no other constraints but those of the mind. In other words, they were not subject, at the level at which they expressed themselves, to any limitations imposed by the outer world. In the case of kinship, it was otherwise. "In *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, I had chosen a field which . . . I tried to show was reducible to a very small number of significant propositions. Yet that first experience was insufficient because in the field of **kinship**, the constraints are not of a purely internal order. I mean by that that it is not certain that their origin is exclusively in the structure of the mind: they might be the result of the necessities of social life, of the ways in which social life imposes its constraints on thought. The second stage which will be entirely devoted to mythology, will try to circumvent this obstacle, for it is precisely, it seems to me, in the field of mythology, where the mind appears to be freest to abandon itself to its creative spontaneity, that it will be interesting to determine whether it is governed by laws."³¹

The admission that in the case of kinship systems some constraints could be external really opens a fatal breach in the logical defences of structuralism. For if **kinship** systems are liable to be determined in part by objective necessities, why not entirely? The primacy of the mind, or at least its independence of any kind of social determinism is implied in all of **Lévi-Strauss's** works, although it runs counter to the anthropological view that the human brain, while being a biological organ, is nonetheless a social product: so that if the mind exercises constraints

on conduct, these constraints ultimately express social needs. From the structuralist point of view, however, the binary oppositions of the human mind constitute a physical condition of the brain, which man shares with the animal world, and which, at a given instant in the course of biological development, emit the notion of reciprocity, introduce the incest prohibition, marriage, the human family and culture. There is no room here for any social causality.

Be that as it may, in *Les structures*, Lévi-Strauss undertakes to show that all forms of marriage are ultimately reducible to the opposition introduced by the incest prohibition. Expressed in a different way and with certain qualifications, this proposition would not be unacceptable, because all sexual life in primitive society is governed by the law of exogamy, whereby sexual intercourse with members of one's group is prohibited and regarded as incestuous.

In saying that all marriage systems are reducible to the opposition between permitted women and forbidden women, and constitute systems of exchange, Lévi-Strauss is therefore saying nothing new, although he is formulating the problem in an unusual way and straining the meaning of some of the concepts used (as, for instance, when stating that kinship systems are systems of exchange, simply because they may be viewed or used as such). When he comes to demonstrate in detail how the properties of some highly complex kinship systems are deducible from his theory of exchange, his demonstration fails to carry conviction. His basic postulate being that kinship systems are different ways in which exchange works, he will not take into consideration the action of social factors—factors external to the structural premises of kinship systems—as being other than contingent. Now, kinship systems are not governed exclusively by structural principles; so that any attempt to account for their variations exclusively in their terms is bound to fall short of its aim.

Les structures, as was natural enough, interested students of kinship with its technicalities. As is evident in the light of Lévi-Strauss's other works, its significance, as that of his work on myth, lies in showing how in the field of kinship, human conduct is moulded by the binary oppositions of the mind. Anthropologists are not particularly interested in this aspect of the question. They are more interested in the details of his analyses of particular systems, and students of primitive mythology in the analysis of particular myths. Yet the impact of structuralism outside the field of anthropology and its ideological implications relate to its basic theoretical postulates; furthermore, it is doubtful whether Lévi-Strauss would have devoted so many years to study first kinship systems and then myths, if he were not motivated by the desire to illustrate a philosophical position in some way, and anthropology offered him the opportunity to do so. For in spite of his career in social

anthropology, both as writer and lecturer, his thinking is not really anthropological. Leach reminds us that his prime training was in philosophy and law: "He consistently behaves as an advocate defending a cause rather than as a scientist searching for ultimate truth."²² At any rate, he makes it abundantly clear that nothing interests him as little as the sociological significance of facts. His interest lies elsewhere, and there is no reason why it should not. That is why so much of what comes under structuralism seems so utterly alien to anthropology, and why it could happen that an "anthropologist" should work out a system destined not to explain sociologically the facts he studies, but to disqualify all explanation of these facts by denying their intrinsic sociological significance.

Paradoxically enough, it is in the field of mythology, where structuralism for the reasons given above, is supposed to deploy its full force, that the results obtained are of least worth, in spite of the loud applause of the "literary clique", as **Needham** would say. For when all is said and done, the detection of oppositions in this field is an illusionist's performance, since a difference may always be manipulated so as to appear as an opposition.²³ **Lévi-Strauss** would have been in a much stronger position if his analyses of myths received confirmation from their meaningful content. His claim that what matters is not what myths say, but the way they say it, is simply a verbal flourish to make a virtue of incapacity. For after insisting so much that the meaning of a myth arises from the combination of **mythemes**, irrespective of their meaning, the least that could be expected of him was to show how the combinations of **mythemes** in the cases he analyses engenders meaning and what that meaning is.

In his analysis of the Oedipus myth, he singles out three events which, he says, express "underrated kinship relations"; but this is simply an abstract formulation of what each murder is supposed to illustrate in the story of the myth, as a story—it is not their allegorical, or mythical, or symbolical meaning. **Lévi-Strauss** avoids posing the question, expected of the student of myths, namely what does the textual meaning of the myth—assuming it is the overrating of kinship relations—really refer to? He seems suddenly to forget all about seeking the meaning of myth at a higher level than that of ordinary language. In actual fact, the story told in the myth cannot reveal its hidden meaning when formulated in abstract terms, because its hidden meaning is contained in the specific terms in which the story is told; for each detail figuring in the story has also an ethnological meaning which it is the mythologist's task to unravel, and which is left out when the story is told in the abstract. Viewed ethnologically, the murder committed by Oedipus is not to be associated with the two other murders related in the myth, but with other acts performed by him and reported in other

parts of the myth, defining him in the role of a violator of taboos. The repetition of such acts is necessary to mark his character as that of violator. As such he is king, cultural hero, possessor of unusual magical powers and capable of solving the riddle that baffled others before him and caused their death. His capacity to answer the question put to him by the Sphinx is thus explained and justifies his encounter with the monster. So also does his violation of taboo, through incest with his mother, which has been identified as the central theme of the myth. The ethnological interpretation of the myth links up all the apparently disconnected and unrelated events of the story and shows that they form a coherent, interlocking whole, giving the meaning of the myth, and Oedipus's role in it. In Lévi-Strauss's analysis not only is Oedipus's incest palmed off as just another example of overrated kinship relations, but the drama that has left such a deep impression on public imagination and which unfolds as Oedipus runs to meet his tragic fate, driven by the acts he performs to avoid it, is entirely neglected. It had to fall to the anthropologist who placed the incest prohibition at the centre of his system, to empty the most celebrated of myths of its human content and rob it of its anthropological and psychological implications.

In the case of myths, the failures of structural analysis are not as apparent as in other fields. In their expression, myths belong to the world of the imaginary. Erratic and unreal as they are, any suggested interpretation of their content or form, however absurd and far-fetched, will be less erratic than they are, and therefore, on the face of it, more or less plausible. Thus the analysis of an apparently incomprehensible myth will always create the impression that it has rendered it less incomprehensible. It can be refuted in two ways only, one negative, by showing that it involves inconsistencies, distortion of facts and bad reasoning; the other positive, by showing that another reading of the myth renders it much more comprehensible.

When we move to kinship structures and other social phenomena, like totemism, or even ritual, which involve human activity and are not limited in their manifestation to the realm of the mind, criteria of objectivity come into play, and the absurdities resulting from structural analysis become more easily perceptible, especially when the phenomena concerned are not so totally incomprehensible as in the case of myths. Thus the structuralist permutatory interpretation of totemism, described above, ridiculous as it is in its imputation of mental perversity to anthropological workers, appears doubly so when the process giving rise to the phenomenon is understood in terms of its development in answer to social needs.¹⁴

In the case of ritual practices, performed to obtain tangible results, the structuralist interpretation appears even more ludicrous. The Hidatsa, a North-American tribe of Indians, are given to eagle-hunting

for the purpose of obtaining eagle-feathers. The hunter crouches inside a hole he has dug in the ground, and covers the opening with leaves and branches on which a bait has been placed. As the eagle flying overhead sees it, swoops down to carry it away and, alights on the branches, the hunter grasps it by the legs and captures it.²⁵

How did the Hidatsa come to invent this method of hunting? Not by observation and experiment, says the structuralist, but thanks to the binary oppositions in their mind. For the eagle flying overhead constitutes the term of a binary opposition of which the other term is something that lies, or should lie, below or underneath. The first term evokes the second by "reciprocity", and the Hidatsa eagle-hunter is impelled by a nondescript inner urge to give it material shape by going down into the hole and placing himself below, in opposition to the eagle above. Through the mediation of the bait, the bird comes down, whereupon the hunter raises his arms up. The distance between the hunter and the hunted shrinks to nought, and as the fingers of the former close on the legs of the latter, the opposites meet, the binary opposition is resolved and the bird is captured!

The first step in structural analysis, then, whatever "fact" it is applied to, is to view it in terms of oppositions, an operation which is always possible, since differences can always be resolved into "oppositions" relatively to a suitable frame of reference. Sometimes this requires quite an effort of the imagination, at other times no effort at all, because oppositions do exist objectively. But in the latter case, a difficulty of another kind arises, for the structuralist now has to show that the objective nature of the opposition is really illusory, or rather results from an ordering effected by the binary oppositions of the mind. In the case of kinship systems, these are all based on the objective socially determined division of society into two basic exogamic groups—groups, that is, which are differentiated by virtue of the incest prohibition. The structural dichotomies investing social conduct and often extending to myths and beliefs, may be shown to be but prolongations of this structural division, and therefore having nothing to do with any hypothetical oppositions within the mind.

The reductionist operations of structural analysis can be justified only on the assumption that on the concrete specific level, social facts have no significance. But when reduced to binary oppositions, to mathematical points or abstract units, represented by plus and minus signs, they have no meaning either, except the mathematical and abstract one of constituting oppositions. How then do they acquire their meaning? Through the combination of their component oppositions, is the structuralist answer. But no structuralist has ever shown how by their combination, abstract units, or elements acquire meaning and what that meaning is.

The truth of the matter is that the so-called structural analysis of social facts, their reduction to their basic component units (binary oppositions), followed by their reconstruction by the combination of the latter are operations carried out independently of their content and of whatever meaning they might have. To pretend the opposite is simply to give proof of the mystificatory character of structuralism. Yet structuralists cannot do otherwise without disqualifying their method. Their argument therefore is that social facts acquire their meaning from the combination of their basic elements, and that to understand that meaning, they have to be broken up into these elements and built up again from their combination. As long as the social facts concerned are not understood, as we saw in the case of myths, any meaning attributed to the combination of their constituent elements, according to the unconscious structures of the mind, has a chance of passing for being logically plausible. When, however, the facts concerned are explained and understood, the fictitious character of structural analysis becomes manifest. The only way left, in these circumstances, to save the structuralist position, is to declare the explanation false, or better still, illusory. This is precisely what **Lévi-Strauss** does when dealing with totemism, describing it as an illusion, while at the same time reducing it to combinations of elements. His purpose in that particular case is "not to understand totemism, but to abolish it", as one writer aptly put it.¹⁰

It follows from all this that structural analysis cannot be applied to social facts that are to be understood without mutilating them, since a given phenomenon is understood to the extent to which its necessary connections with other phenomena have been determined, while its reduction by analysis requires such connections to be severed in order to "free its component elements and allow them to be permuted. We saw, in the case of the Oedipus myth, that once it is realized that the parricide committed by Oedipus is necessarily connected to other events—such as his incest with his mother—in that they build his character as a violator of taboos, endowing him with the magical powers that will enable him to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, the myth acquires meaning. Compared to this, the structuralist assimilation of Oedipus's parricide to other cases of murder on the basis of a factual analogy, followed by their forced reduction to "underrated kinship relations" to be opposed to "overrated kinship relations", appears as a puerile exercise of the imagination. It is simply because the necessary connections and the meaning of the myth were not understood by **Lévi-Strauss**, that searching for an opposition by **reshuffling** the items of the myth to fit them into a symmetrical pattern, he finally managed to invent one, which however explains nothing.

Structuralism as an Ideology

It must be clear that a doctrine which by its aims, methods, and results obstructs scientific enquiry and leads student and investigator astray, renders an immense service to the forces of reaction in the field of ideology and social science, where these forces have no greater enemy than the revelation of the nature, function and significance of social facts.

These forces have always been hostile to the development of the social sciences as *sciences*. They have not been opposed to their development as *methods* for collecting, analysing and classifying information. Such information, manipulated and processed, has managerial and technical value in reducing waste in production, promoting more refined methods of exploitation, and even increasing productivity. The aim of social science is thus perverted in order to apply it not to the discovery of the sociological or causal explanation of facts—which is dangerous—but to their manipulation for the purpose of serving economic ends—which is profitable. Structuralism fits in perfectly with this scheme, since it fulfils the double purpose of disqualifying the search for explanation and substituting for it fact manipulation. This is not accidental. Structuralism represents the culminating point of a theoretical trend in social anthropology that goes back to the years immediately preceding the first World War. The previous period had been dominated by the idea of evolution. Historical development was then still viewed as part and parcel of the general evolutionary process at work in nature, and was explanatory. By the beginning of the 20th century, social evolutionism, with its condemnation of the capitalist form of production and its socialist anticipation of the future, could no longer be tolerated. This placed it under "severe attack"; and in anthropology, the attack was carried out with extraordinary violence.⁸⁷

Commenting on this "attack", Leach relates it to developments in the physical sciences. The connection between the physical sciences and social evolutionism is visibly remote; yet it undoubtedly exists and explains how structuralism came to acquire its particular character and assume an ideological role today. Obviously, it was not the physicists who were going to take up arms for or against social evolutionism. They come into the picture, however, in that their discipline being the least historical, as it were, of all the sciences, a philosophy inspired by its subject-matter would be the most likely to provide general concepts uncontaminated by historicism and evolutionism, as required, and applicable to the social sciences. This is precisely what happened.

It was Ernst Mach who, perhaps more than any other physicist, drew philosophical conclusions from the new physics. His declared aim, to substitute functional analysis for causal analysis, did not fall on deaf ears, and was enthusiastically acclaimed by Robert Lowie, a personal

friend and fervid admirer (Mach was "the dominant influence of my maturer days"; "the founder of a new and real scientific liberalism"), who made it the corner-stone of his anthropological teaching.³⁸ Indeed, no one applied himself as diligently to the task of outlawing—the word is no exaggeration³⁹—the idea of evolution in social anthropology, through his attacks on L. H. Morgan.

The offensive against Morgan provides an interesting and illuminating chapter in the history of social anthropology. That evolutionism was combated on purely methodological grounds, as in the case of Lowie and others, is no doubt true. But it is no less true that other motivations were also involved which were to turn the offensive into a real crusade. "The Marxist and Communist adoption of nineteenth century evolutionism, especially of L. H. Morgan's scheme, as official dogma, has certainly not favoured the acceptability to scientists of the Western nations of anything labelled 'evolution' ", wrote J. H. Steward, an American anthropologist.⁴⁰ As evidence of this, one may quote Malinowski: "Evolutionism is now the wholly accepted anthropological creed in the Soviet Union, in which form, of course, it ceases to be scientific."⁴¹ As Eleanor Leacock shrewdly remarks, "since Morgan's works was used as the basis for Engels' 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State', arguments about Morgan are often veiled arguments about Marx."⁴² To sum up in the words of yet another anthropologist, "the adoption of the evolutionary thesis, in general, and Morgan's theories, in particular, by Karl Marx and the socialist and working class movement, has raised the powerful opposition of the capitalist system. Thus, antievolutionism has become the *credo* of certain sectors of society . . . a philosophy bringing its support to the Church, private property, the family and the capitalist state."⁴³

Lowie's explanation of the popularity which evolutionism enjoyed in the 19th century was that "the belief in social progress was a natural accompaniment of the belief in historical laws, especially when tinged with the evolutionary optimism of the seventies of the nineteenth century".⁴⁴ By the same token, the spread of "synchronic" theories (functionalism, structuralism) in the 20th century ought to be "tinged" by the pessimism accompanying the social and ideological crisis of that century, and indeed pessimism is well reflected both in Lowie's writings and more so, significantly, in those of Lévi-Strauss. Similarly it should not be impossible to find "sociological" explanations of the popularity of "synchronic" theories in the 20th century.⁴⁵

"Sociological" interpretations, however, are not enough to account for the development of the trend that has led to modern structuralism, though they may account for its success. That is why the reference to Lowie here is not incidental. For if Lowie was deeply influenced by Mach and applied the latter's methodology to social anthropology, he

was also to become the friend and *maître à penser* of none other than **Lévi-Strauss**. The filiation of ideas running from the world of physics to that of philosophy (ideology), to that of anthropology and structuralism is remarkable and could not have been more direct. It could, in fact, be described as genetic, for the structuralist approach developed by **Lévi-Strauss** is already contained in Lowie's methodology. Lowie's classification of kinship systems, for instance, (into four groups) based on combinatory logic, is of essentially the same type as **Lévi-Strauss's** later "classification" of totemic phenomena (also into four groups), and suffers from the same defects and for the same reasons. It is thus an error to see in **Lévi-Strauss** a representative of the traditional French school of anthropology, simply because he works in France and writes in French, and poses as the continuator of Mauss.

The error is understandable. Much less understandable is the other error of regarding him as an adept of Hegelian dialectics. Lowie was under the influence of Mach's neo-positivism, not **Hegel's** dialectics. The development of physical science and of technology reinforced the "scientific" justification of neo-positivist thought and the depreciation of causal in favour of functional analysis. Translated into sociological terms, this meant the rejection, in the field of social (and anthropological) studies, of historical and evolutionary interpretation, whether Hegelian or materialistic, in favour of the "functionalist" approach. For Lowie, for instance, "laws" in social anthropology could at best refer to invariable correlations, excluding all idea of "necessity". The same idea is expressed by **Lévi-Strauss**, for whom "'understanding history' will have to be given up in order to make of the study of different cultures a synchronic analysis of the relations between their constituent elements in the present".⁴⁶

Dialectical methodology has been attributed to **Lévi-Strauss** owing, among other things, to his constant references to the "contradiction" between the so-called binary oppositions of the mind, supposedly at the bottom of all structural inversions and symmetries. But "contradiction" occupies as important a part, negatively, in formal logic as, positively, in dialectics. In structural analysis, the contradiction manifested in a binary opposition is totally inoperative unless understood in its absolute, anti-dialectical sense. Structuralism takes into account only that aspect of contradiction whereby the terms in opposition sharply exclude each other, for whatever bears on the unity and the interdependence of contraries does away with the essential condition of structural analysis. Structuralism cannot go beyond the limits of formal logic and is essentially anti-dialectical.

That is why the concept of society as a living organism in process of constant change and development is abhorrent to structuralists and seldom, if ever, appears in their writings. Society they prefer to view

as "something mechanically assembled, allowing for all sorts of arbitrary combinations between a variety of social elements", to use **Lenin's** words directed at his opponents of the day, but admirably suited to characterize modern structuralism.⁴⁷

The structuralist view of society, which chooses to ignore the revolution in men's thoughts brought about by the theory of evolution in the 19th century, revives the mechanistic world-view of the preceding period. It constitutes a regression, which had already been envisaged as a possibility by Engels, not to the crude though historically justified mechanistic philosophy of that period, but to a mechanistic philosophy of the same type, expressed in the language of modern technique by "automatic control" and represented by the digital computer.

The air of modernity which thus pervades **Lévi-Strauss's** structuralism is largely due to his use of the terminology and concepts of present-day cybernetics. Social facts and relationships, expressed in terms of "messages", "information", "communication", "patterns", "combinations" etc., lead down ultimately to the abstract units of "binary oppositions". It is here that the hard core of structuralism fully reveals itself. For the structuralist permutatory reconstructions of social facts from these basic units, on the model of the combinatory yes-no logic of the digital computer, takes the mechanical contradiction between the terms of binary oppositions as the basic unit of articulation between necessarily discrete elements. The ultimate result of structural analysis, which consists, as stated before, of washing away the specificity of social phenomena by reducing them to combinations of their component elements, also implies that the latter, whatever their degree of abstraction, are discrete. Growth, development and change, as dialectical processes carried through by virtue of inherent contradictions working themselves out, are not viewed as such. They are viewed as the outer appearance which different combinations of standard elements present when appearing in succession.

Thus, when dealing with ritual as a social phenomenon (magical), **Lévi-Strauss** is at pains to break it down into its constituent elements without destroying it in the process. A rite appears functionally as a continuous whole, and the structuralist problem is to show that it is really discontinuous, consisting of a chain of discrete elements. Ritual practice, according to **Lévi-Strauss**, consists of "words uttered, gestures performed and objects manipulated".⁴⁸ Since "gestures" and "objects" fulfil the office of words by other means, they may be assimilated to them. Brought down to a common denominator, they are all thus permutable. At the same time, the strict, scrupulous observance of prescribed gestures and movements in their minutest details, on the one hand; and their constant repetition in ritual on the other, show, first, that each detail is identified as a distinct infinitesimal element; and,

second, that through their repetition in succession such details fall in to form a single sequence. "Differences which have become infinitesimal tend to coalesce and virtually to achieve identity; and so we come once more to that figure evoked by the film strip which decomposes motion into such small units that their successive images become indistinguishable and seem to repeat one another."⁴⁸ Thus, "starting from discrete units", ritual "reaches out for the continuous and strives to attain it" but always fails to, as, structurally, it must; whence the touch of frenzy and exacerbation which always accompanies it.⁴⁹ The argument is ingenious though unconvincing; if put forward at all, it is to emphasize that the elements entering into combination must be discrete, otherwise, by computer-logic, they cannot combine. The mechanistic character of structural analysis is thus implicitly asserted.

In viewing social change not dynamically, as the expression of social development through the development of the forces of production, economic and political struggle etc., but statically, as the expression of different combinations of unchanging elements, structuralism represents history as a chronology of the reshufflings and re-alignments of the inner structures, institutions and cultural acquisitions of human societies, in order to maintain them in equilibrium and ensure their survival. "Men", says Lévi-Strauss, "have always and everywhere set themselves the same task and fixed before themselves the same objective. . . . In the course of their becoming, only the means have changed; through succeeding millenia, man has only managed to repeat himself."⁵¹

In this refusal to recognize that historical change is a process of development, in favour of the combinatory interpretation of social facts,⁵² structuralism provides the operational justification for the hostility which conservatism, as stated, manifests towards the social sciences. For if, in the course of structural analysis and reduction, social facts lose their specificity, nothing remains of the subject-matter of these sciences. With the destruction of social facts, as *social* facts, the sciences that study them cave in and vanish. Lévi-Strauss does indeed suggest something of the kind, though in a different way in order to grant them a temporary respite, as it were. The real answers to social problems, according to him, are to be provided by the physical and natural sciences. However, as these sciences are yet incapable of supplying them, there is room for the so-called social sciences to play their role as "shadow" sciences, in order to "assuage the craving for immediate knowledge with approximate answers, and to offer the physical and natural sciences an anticipatory but often useful simulacrum of the truer knowledge which it will be their lot one day to articulate".⁵³ The present role of the social sciences is therefore not entirely useless. They act, though imperfectly, by proxy, as it were, on behalf

of the physical and natural science, until such a time when these are ready to assume their full responsibilities.

It is evident from Lévi-Strauss's many remarks that when speaking of the physical and natural sciences in this connection, he has in mind information theory. "Society can only be understood through the study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it", is a remark by Norbert Wiener, whom Lévi-Strauss is fond of quoting; but this has to await future developments of communication or Information theory before the physical and natural sciences can take over from the "social sciences".⁶⁴ All this, of course, is calculated to validate the scientific character of structuralism, which entails the effacement of social specificity in its analytical reductionist procedures, prefiguring the effacement of the social sciences themselves.

This again betrays the mechanistic nature of structuralism, incapable of recognizing the qualitative specificity which matter acquires at each different level of organization. The reductionist attempt to interpret objective phenomena in terms of those which conceptually appear as at the most fundamental level—for instance, the physical, or mechanical—is not new. Its failure is due precisely to those qualitative distinctions which render phenomena belonging to one level irreducible to another, and not to any theoretical weakness or insufficiency. If, for instance, biological phenomena depend on physical and chemical processes, these, when integrated in the living organism, exhibit properties particular to the latter which are irreducible to purely physical and chemical interpretations. However operationally powerful Information theory may prove to be and useful in the analysis of social action and reaction, it can therefore never become a substitute for the sociological interpretation of social facts, that is for their interpretation in terms of the dialectics of historical development. Still, once again, the ideological character of structuralism reveals itself as not only springing from its anti-dialectical approach, but as aiming, further, at eliminating from the field of investigation the method of historical analysis which gives the explanation of social facts in terms of their own development—in terms of the *social* forces that give rise to them, and the *social* purposes which they are called upon to serve—not in terms of phenomena belonging to other dimensions of reality, such as "messages", "information" etc.

Whether it is through its reductionism, the recourse to combinatory logic in its operations, or through the utilization of the technological terminology of information theory, structuralism presents social phenomena, relationships and processes in terms of the concepts introduced by that theory. Sociological laws—as natural laws of society—thus appear as technological necessities; while technological necessities appear, conversely, as possessing the force of natural law. In

other words, as nature and society are increasingly interpreted in terms of information theory or cybernetics ("signals", "communication", "feedback" etc.), the application of the teachings of that theory to the organization of society must seem natural and necessary. The latter follows from the former. Ideologically, structuralism prepares for obtaining acceptance of the social order, modelled by technology, as the natural order of things; while on the scientific plane, it prepares in its field of operation—anthropology—for the effacement of that discipline. The question naturally arises: Is structuralism, then, Science or Ideology? The validity of its claim to be the former is challenged in the preceding pages. To give an answer more in line with structuralist style, let us suggest that if Science and Ideology may be said—rightly or wrongly, structurally it does not matter—to form a "binary opposition", it is in the ideological "message", not the scientific, that structuralism, in fine, puts its "information".

NOTES

1. "Some readers even suspect that they are being treated to a confidence trick." — E. Leach, *Lévi-Strauss*, London, Fontana, 1970, p. 8.
2. E. Leach (ed.), "Introduction" in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, London, Tavistock, 1967, pp. xvi–xvii.
3. Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949), Paris, Plon, 1967, p. xiv. "There is little evidence that many French critics understand him (or succeed in reproducing his ideas in detail) more clearly than those overseas do." G. S. Kirk, *Myth*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 59.
Leach, "Claude Lévi-Strauss—Anthropologist and Philosopher", *New Left Review*, 1965, 34:27.
5. Leach, "Mythologiques: Le cru et le cuit", *American Anthropologist*, 1965, 67:776.
6. See our "Présentation" and "Introductions" in L. H. Morgan, *La société archaïque*, Paris, Anthropos, 1971.
7. Lévi-Strauss, *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris, PUF, 1962.
8. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris, Plon, 1958, pp. 235–7.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50.
10. Lévi-Strauss, *Du miel aux cendres*, Paris, Plon, 1966, p. 215.
11. Cf. R. and L. Makarius, *Structuralisme et Ethnologie*, Paris, Anthropos, 1973, p. 295 n. 5.
12. Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, Paris, Plon, 1964, p. 21.
13. Nur Yalman, "La Pensée sauvage", *American Anthropologist*, 1964, 66:1181.
14. *Anthropologie structurale*, p. 373.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
18. G. Sterner, "A Conversation with Claude Lévi-Strauss", *Encounter*, 1966, 26:32–38.
19. *Anthropologie structurale*, p. 232.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

21. Lévi-Strauss, "La structure et la forme", *Cahiers de l'Institut des Sciences économiques appliquées*, 1960, 99:35.
22. *Anthropologie structurale*, p. 79.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 326–7.
25. "In the version of Lévi-Strauss, the essence of 'structuralist' method seems to be in the construction of deliberately abstract models by the artificial breaking down of the object under study and its subsequent reconstruction in terms of essentially relational properties," W. G. Runciman, "What is Structuralism", *British Journal of Sociology*, 1969, 20:257. The author misses an essential point. The aim is not just the reconstruction of the object under study, but the construction of all possible "objects", of which the one under study is a particular case.

Some of these ideas were expressed by Lévi-Strauss as long ago as 1950, referring to Mauss: "... for the first time in the history of anthropology thought an effort was made to transcend empirical observation and reach deeper realities. For the first time, things social ceased to belong to the domain of pure quality. . . and appeared as forming a system revealing connections, equivalences and interdependence between its component parts. Such are first of all the products of social activity: technical, economic, ritual, aesthetic or religious—tools, manufactured goods, foodstuffs, magical formulas, ornaments, songs, dances and myths—admitting comparison between each other by virtue of that character, which they share in common, of being transferable through processes which may be analysed and classified and which, even when they seem to be welded to certain types of values, are reducible to general, more fundamental forms. These products of social activity not only admit comparison, but are also interchangeable, insofar as different values may replace one another in a single operation. It is moreover these operations themselves, however diversified they may appear when seen through the events of social life, such as birth, initiation, marriage, contract, death and inheritance, and however arbitrary with respect to the number and distribution of the individuals they involve, whether as fellows, intermediaries, or donors, which always permits a reduction to a smaller number of operations, groups or persons, where, in fine, one again finds only the basic terms of an equilibrium diversely conceived and differently realized, according to the type of society concerned. Those types may thus be defined by these intrinsic attributes, and compared to one another, since these attributes are no longer ordered qualitatively, but according to the number and disposal of elements which are themselves invariable for all of the types concerned . . ." (Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss" in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (1950), Paris, PUF, 1966, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv).

This laboriously worded passage is a good sample of Lévi-Strauss's style, when he chooses to make it deliberately tortuous and involuted. It would have been simpler to express the simple ideas it contains in simple words, but that would have perhaps made them less impressive. The general tone and long-winded sentences conspire to suggest that profound truths are being uttered. But the "transcending of empirical observation to reach deeper realities" is just another way of saying that social facts are to be expressed in the general terms to which they are reducible; and the succeeding sentences are to indicate that these terms, when they are not identical and merge into one another, are at least of the same order and therefore permutable. In 1962, Lévi-Strauss gave a more succinct description of his method:

1. define the phenomenon under study as a relation between two or more terms, real or implied;
2. draw up a table of possible permutations between these terms;
3. regard **this** table as the general subject of an analysis conducive, at this level

only, to necessary connections—the empirical phenomenon, initially considered, being one possible combination out of many which, together, form an all-comprehensive system to be reconstructed beforehand (*Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, p. 22).

26. *Les structures* . . . , p. xxvii.
27. *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, p. 24.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
29. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale II*, Paris, Plon, 1973, p. 38.
30. Cf. *Structuralisme ou Ethnologie*.
31. Lévi-Strauss, "Réponses à quelques questions", *Esprit*, 1963, 11:630.
32. Leach, *Lévi-Strauss*, p. 20.
33. Cf. *Structuralism ou Ethnologie*.
34. R. et L. Makarius. *L'Origine de l'Exogamie et du Totémisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961.
35. *Structuralisme ou Ethnologie*, pp. 235–76.
36. P. Worsley, "Groote Eyland Totemism and *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*", in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, p. 142.
37. Leach in R. Firth (ed.), *Man and Culture*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957, p. 120. Cf. "Présentation" in *La Société Archaïque*.
38. R. Lowie, *R. H. Lowie, Ethnologist*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959, p. 60. M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 345.
39. This applies particularly to the period extending from the First World War till about 1959. "In 1939, when I discussed 'Evolution in Social Anthropology' at Association meetings in Chicago, I had been warned by a social scientist, who was by no means extreme in his views, that 'evolution' was a dirty, dangerous word, and urged one to replace it by the word 'development'." (A. Lesser, "Social Fields and the Evolution of Society", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 1961, p. 40). In 1940, as Radcliffe-Brown could confirm, "in certain anthropological circles the term 'evolutionary anthropologist' is almost a term of abuse". (*Structure and Function*, London, 1956, p. 203.)
40. In A. Kroeber (ed.), *Anthropology Today*, Chicago: Univ. Press, 1953, p. 315.
41. *A Scientific Theory of Culture*, Chapel Hill, 1944, p. 17.
42. "Morgan and Materialism," *Cuwent Anthropology*, 1964, 5: 110.
43. L. White, "The Concept of Evolution in Cultural Anthropology", in B. Meggers (ed.), *Evolution and Anthropology*, Washington, 1959, p. 109.
44. *Primitive Society* (1921), New York, 1947, p. 440.
45. Thus R. C. Lewontin: "Like all revolutions the bourgeois revolution gave way slowly to a period of consolidation. . . . Once the new classes had gained power, it was clearly to their advantage to prevent the evolution from going further. . . . Liberal democracy of the twentieth century has a vested interest in maintaining the world social order. . . . It is not remarkable, then, that evolutionary theories of the twentieth century are marked by a concern for equilibrium conditions and dynamic stability, a playing down of progressivist and perfectionist elements, and a general reliance on the principle that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*." ("Evolution" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1968, vol. V, p. 209.)
46. *Anthropologie structurale*, p. 13.
47. V. Lénine, *Ce que sont les "amis du peuple" et comment ils luttent contre les social-démocrates* (1894), Moscow, 1966, p. 55.
48. *L'Homme nu*, Paris, Plon, 1971, p. 600.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 602.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 607–8.
51. *Tristes Tropiques*, Paris, Plon, 1955, p. 424.
52. Lowie had clearly expressed this position: "Neither morphologically nor dynamically can social life be said to have progressed from a stage of savagery to a state of

enlightenment. . . . The renunciation of historical laws does not imply the renunciation of uniformities, *independent of the time factor*, and veritably inherent in the very essence of social existence . . . empirically it turns out that the several types of social units are combined in a purely capricious fashion." (*Primitive Society*, pp. 440, 436, 430.)

53. *L'Homme nu*, p. 573.

54. *The Human Use of Human Beings*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950, p. 9.