

André Bételle, Professor Emeritus,
University of Delhi

Maurice Bloch, Department of
Anthropology, London School of
Economics and Political Science

Rita Brara, Department of Sociology,
University of Delhi

Philippe Descola, Collège de France

Pradeep Dhillon, Department of
Philosophy, University of Illinois at
Urbana Champaign

Harjit S. Gill, Professor (retired), School
of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru
University

Dipankar Gupta, Professor (retired),
School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal
Nehru University

Vincent Debaene, Department of
French and Romance Philology,
Columbia University

Franson Manjali, School of Languages,
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Deepak Mehta, Department of
Sociology, University of Delhi

Dipankar Gupta taught sociology and
social anthropology at Jawaharlal Nehru
University for about 30 years, from
January 1980 to July 2009 when he took
early retirement. Author and editor of
15 titles, his latest publication is *The
Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly?* He has
taught in several universities in India
and abroad.



YODAPRESS
www.yodapress.com

'A Hero of Our Time'
Susan Sontag

'Claude Lévi-Strauss was one of the
dominating postwar influences in French
intellectual life and the leading exponent
of Structuralism in the social sciences;
his work inspired a school
of academic followers in the 1960s and
1970s in disciplines ranging from music
to literary criticism.'

The Telegraph

'Claude Lévi-Strauss' revolutionary
studies of what was once called
'primitive man' transformed Western
understanding of the nature of culture,
custom and civilization. His legacy is
imposing. *Mythologiques*, his
four-volume work about the structure of
native mythology in the Americas,
attempts nothing less than an interpreta-
tion of the world of culture and custom,
shaped by analysis of several hundred
myths of little-known tribes and
traditions. The volumes, *The Raw and the
Cooked*, *From Honey to Ashes*, *The Origin
of Table Manners* and *The Naked Man*,
published from 1964 to 1971, challenge
the reader
with their complex
interweaving of theme and detail.'

New York Times

'...one of the preeminent anthropologists
of the 20th century whose erudite, often
mind-bendingly labored studies of
indigenous Brazilian tribes led to
influential theories about human
behavior and culture...'

The Washington Post

₹295

ISBN 93-80403-13-5



9 789380 403137

edited by
Dipankar Gupta

My Favourite
Lévi-Strauss



My Favourite Lévi-Strauss



edited by
Dipankar Gupta



My Favourite Lévi-Strauss

edited by

Dipankar Gupta



YODA PRESS



YODA PRESS
268 A/C Vasant Kunj
New Delhi 110070

Published in India
by YODA PRESS

© Dipankar Gupta 2011

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right YODA PRESS (maker)

First Published 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of YODA PRESS, or as expressly permitted by law, or under the terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organisation. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to YODA PRESS, at the address above.

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer.

ISBN 978-93-80403-13-7

Typeset in Bembo Std 11/14.4
By Joji Philip, New Delhi 110 015
Printed at Japan Art Press, New Delhi 110 028
Published by Arpita Das for YODA PRESS, New Delhi

Contents

The Making of 'My Favourite Lévi-Strauss'	vii
<i>Dipankar Gupta</i>	
Claude Lévi-Strauss: A Rationalist among Empiricists	1
<i>André Béteille</i>	
Claude Lévi-Strauss: His Life and Work	5
<i>Philippe Descola</i>	
To Transform or to Transmorph: From Totemism to Traffic Lights to Caste	16
<i>Dipankar Gupta</i>	
Why a Cousin Becomes a Spouse: Elementary, says Lévi-Strauss	43
<i>Rita Brara</i>	
Claude Lévi-Strauss, 2008: What Anniversary?	61
<i>Vincent Debaene</i>	
Mythologique: The Structural Method of Claude Lévi-Strauss	76
<i>Harjeet Singh Gill</i>	
Lévi-Strauss or Sartre? Kant and the Savage Mind	89
<i>Pradeep A. Dhillon</i>	

On Language and the Assumed Unity of the Human Sciences <i>Franson Manjali</i>	101
'Naming' Conversion: Being Muslim in Old Delhi <i>Deepak Mehta</i>	118
Lévi-Strauss and Evolutionary Theory <i>Maurice Bloch</i>	145
Appendix	159

The Making of 'My Favourite Lévi-Strauss'

In celebrating the 100th birthday of Professor Claude Lévi-Strauss, we are giving ourselves the opportunity to revive a major inspirational fount of much of our received knowledge as anthropologists. For more than five decades, Professor Lévi-Strauss has influenced professional anthropologists, and indeed scholars in all the social sciences through his wide ranging researches, made all the more remarkable by his novel explication of structuralism. One can easily say that after Lévi-Strauss, the way we think can never be the same.

Quite like the myths he wrote about with such finesse, Lévi-Strauss's own works have devotees and followers who lean more heavily on this or that text of the master. We all have our *favourite* Lévi-Strauss who stands by our side guiding our research and teaching with the complete conviction that there is a unity that binds humankind.

Accordingly, in the conference on which this volume is based, the contributors did not attempt to write essays on the lines of 'what-Lévi-Strauss-really-meant', but rather in the spirit of being inspired by him in ways that would otherwise have escaped their imagination. There is, therefore, no attempt at orthodoxy, or even a

diversity of cousin marriage practices looms larger than even Lévi-Strauss's remarkable study.

Lévi-Strauss's formidable theorizing blazed a trail, though from my vantage point today cross-cousins do not exhaust the universe of terms in the discourse on cousin marriage. But if cousin marriage and its study still persist it is perhaps because humans have not forgotten the elementary expressions of sociality which it affords and that Claude Lévi-Strauss illuminated for us so well.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, 2008 What Anniversary?

VINCENT DEBAENE

When a chair of social anthropology was created at the Collège de France and awarded to Claude Lévi-Strauss, he started his opening lecture by mentioning a kind of personal myth attached to the number 8: the chair had been created in 1958; both Franz Boas and Durkheim, the two founders of social anthropology, were born in 1858; 300 years earlier, in 1558, the traveller Jean de Léry (whom Lévi-Strauss considered a forerunner of his own work) had encountered the Tupi Indians for the first time; Lévi-Strauss himself had met the Tupi 20 years earlier, in 1938, and so on. Lévi-Strauss did not mention, though it was implicit, that he was born in 1908, but his entry into the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade in 2008, the very year he turned 100 added another chapter to this little story and extended this myth to our present day.

This event created unexpected media frenzy. It graced the cover of *L'Express*, *le Point* and *le Nouvel Observateur* with headlines such as 'Le dernier des géants', 'le penseur du siècle', 'l'homme qui a révolutionné la pensée', and the like. Numerous special issues were (and still are) devoted to his work in magazines such as *le Magazine littéraire* or scholarly journals such as *Esprit*, *the Revue de philosophie*, and so on. Countless articles were devoted to the event in daily

newspapers: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, not to mention the radio and even TV shows.

A short word about La Pléiade: it is the most prestigious French literary series, from the publisher Gallimard. It was created in 1931 with the mandate to collect the masterpieces of French and world literature. The volumes are critical editions, full of annotations, comments, quotes from the manuscripts, edition variants, and so on. The very packaging of the books calls attention to their status as special, exemplary: they are provided in an elegant cardboard case, with the highest quality features, the pages are made of parchment paper and bound in leather with gold lettering on the spine; the compact size of the volumes makes them look like a small Bible.

Several elements about Lévi-Strauss's publication in the Pléiade attract attention: first of all, Lévi-Strauss entered the series during his lifetime, 'de son vivant'. This suggests an absolute consecration. It is not the first time that this has happened—that a living author has been welcomed into the Pléiade, but some things about this instance set it apart. First, Lévi-Strauss took an active part in this publication by virtue of the fact that he himself selected the works collected in the volume, and this is unprecedented. Many journalists have been quick to point out that the specialist of myth has himself become a living myth.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss is an anthropologist of the most scientific species. He is famous for having introduced an almost mathematical rigour into the study of human behaviour, particularly kinship. His work is renowned at once for the encyclopedic knowledge it displays, for its technical difficulty and for its abstraction. The fact that it is becoming part of the literary canon appears then all the more striking: not only is he a scientist, famous among his peers, but also a writer speaking to a larger audience.

Finally, part of the media frenzy likely stemmed from the fact that Lévi-Strauss himself remained unreachable throughout: he

refused to give any interviews whether for newspapers or radio. So there was a kind of presence/absence game: he was very present because he was alive and he selected the works. But he was also out of reach, because he was incredibly old, and journalists only had archival footage to play on TV or radio, as if he were already dead. Some articles compared him to a lighthouse guard or to an old sentinel sending messages from very far away.

Such a reception might well be a topic for a cultural historian: one would identify in these events a very French attachment to literature, which is seen as part of national heritage and cultural identity. One might comment on a recent tendency toward commemoration and celebration; the nostalgia made possible by having a standpoint from which a (French) scholar could compare all cultures; the creation of the intellectual as a cultural hero, and so on. Although these questions are of the utmost interest, especially in an intercultural perspective, I would like to ask more directly: what was being celebrated? What was this anniversary? Was it the centenary of a birth? The 50 years since the publication of the seminal book, *Structural Anthropology*? The 40 years since the end of the so-called 'structuralist decade'?

Behind every anniversary lie the same questions: what was being commemorated and what does it mean *for us today*? This is also a very concrete, very simple question: why should I read Lévi-Strauss now? What will such a reading bring to me?

I will start with a very simple observation: an anniversary is not just one date; it is always the conflation of two dates. As such, it supposes temporality, the comparison between a before and a now, the assumption of a history and the production of a sense of history. The meaning of an anniversary is never a given; it is built through the confrontation between a past and a present; it can stress distance or proximity, progression or regression, permanence or discontinuity. So the question is: what is the underlying temporal

model? What conception of history—or conceptions of history—are being silently mobilized?

I will first try to bring to light the temporal models which, to me, seem to lie behind the media celebration. How does the commemoration relate Claude Lévi-Strauss' work to time itself? I would like to explore the ways that this celebration is rooted in a specific conception of the divide between science and literature as a divide between two relationships to time. Then, I would like to try to use Lévi-Strauss's work, if not to contest the divide, then maybe to help us think of it in different terms—because, indeed, his work says a lot about the divide between science and literature.

If we ask 'what is Lévi-Strauss to us today?', the entry into the Pléiade the same year as his centenary is in itself an answer. As the work of Lévi-Strauss is solemnly consecrated as a national monument, this means that it will always be relevant to our times. It is integrated into the canon through a performative gesture: we make a bet on the future and at the same time prepare for such a future by decreeing: 'this work is immortal; it is part of those works to which it will always be good to go back.' This has been the classical scheme of the relationship between science and literature in France since the nineteenth century: a work which, *in its time*, was intended to be scientific later *turns into* literature and is decreed *timeless*.

The classical example of this type of elevation from science to literature is that of the naturalist Buffon. At the turn of the nineteenth century, his work was dismissed by the first generation of 'biologists', the ones who were embodying the shift from natural history to biology. Suddenly, Buffon's writings appeared out-of-date. I quote the naturalist Georges Cuvier who in many ways can be seen as Buffon's successor: Buffon was 'deluding himself with

too many tropes'; he was depending too much on imagination and not enough on analysis and demonstration; he had 'procedural weaknesses that only the most trained scholars can be aware of'. However, said Cuvier, Buffon will nevertheless 'remain as one of our most eloquent and immortal writers'. This is a classical gesture: *what is lost for science may sometimes be rescued by style*. What has been passed over by the advancement of serious knowledge is abandoned but, in the same move, is restored in another dimension of time: the one of memory and oeuvres. Such a gesture is by no means specific to natural history; one could find numerous examples from historians or geographers. This is what happened to Michelet's work, for instance, at the end of the nineteenth century: academic historians came to the shared conclusion that his studies could not provide grounds for serious historical work, but they all also agreed that Michelet would remain unrivalled for his depictions of the French Revolution.

So in a way, that is what is happening with Lévi-Strauss' entry into the Pléiade. The media celebration is implicitly rooted in the Buffon model. It says: 'Never mind the diagrams; never mind the elementary structures of kinship; never mind the canonical formula of myth; forget the scientific ambition of an "inventory of mental patterns"'; Lévi-Strauss' work will remain *despite* his scientific ambition. What the anniversary means is precisely this: *the question of relevance has itself become irrelevant*. Lévi-Strauss' work is entering a new category, another region of our culture. The scientist might wonder 'what remains?' and might want to draw a line and distinguish between what is still relevant and what has become obsolete, but from a cultural standpoint, these questions don't matter anymore: the work will remain; something in it will always remain. The articles published on the eve of the centenary reveal that the criteria for Lévi-Strauss's consecration are similar to the ones which saved Buffon from oblivion: Lévi-Strauss will

remain an 'immortal writer', a great stylist, a unique combination of 'esprit de finesse' and 'esprit de géométrie', and a perfect example of a very French tradition, which started with Montaigne, went through Montesquieu and Rousseau, and combines cultural relativism, curiosity for the exotic and meditation on human nature. He has joined the prestigious tribe of what Baudelaire called the 'phares'—the beacons.

Most of the time during the centenary excitement, there was another aspect as well: the consecration of the great anthropologist was seen as proof of the inherent insufficiency of anthropology and of the supreme position of literature in the hierarchy of discourses. According to many editorialists, by lionizing Lévi-Strauss as a writer, we are just reconnecting to a glorious past when literature and the study of man were undifferentiated. This was particularly obvious in the most conservative press. The entry into the Pléiade was seen as the rediscovery of a forgotten truth, which 50 years of kinship systems and structural analysis had overshadowed: that there is something in man which will always escape scientific discourse, a *je-ne-sais-quoi* that literature alone is able to grasp. I suppose that Lévi-Strauss' conservative positions on numerous issues fostered this interpretation, but it remains nonetheless true that conservative intellectuals were quick to see the entry into the Pléiade as an opportunity to revere Lévi-Strauss l'académicien (Lévi-Strauss is member of the most conservative literary institution in France: l'Académie française) while getting rid of Lévi-Strauss the structuralist. Paradoxically, this Pléiade was seen less as a recognition of the social sciences than as evidence of their insufficiency and their inability to reach their goal without the help of literature, style or poetry.

Such reasoning is not quite satisfying though, for at least two reasons. First of all, it is very unfaithful to Lévi-Strauss' thought. Lévi-Strauss has always described anthropology, if not as a science, at

least as a discipline aiming at scientificness. He has always been very critical towards writers or literary scholars who, without training, method or empirical data, claim to have an 'anthropological' scope. He has even described the history of anthropology as a succession of revolutions similar to the revolutions in physics, comparing for example the theory of reciprocity to the theory of gravitation, the British anthropologist William Halse Rivers playing the role of Galileo, Marcel Mauss the role of Newton—and, I guess, although he did not mention it, himself being the Einstein of reciprocity. To Lévi-Strauss, if there should be a science of the human mind, it certainly won't occur *within* literature. So I am a little reluctant about a consecration which would celebrate Lévi-Strauss against himself.

Furthermore, such a reading of Lévi-Strauss' consecration relies on a great divide between science and literature and between their respective ability to increase our knowledge of humanity. I won't argue here that this divide is not legitimate. I won't try to show that writers and scientists are engaged in similar tasks and I won't try to unveil the rhetorical strategies used by scientists. To me, the question is not: 'is there a divide?' but how does the divide function? How is it used? I would now like to expand a little on that point because Lévi-Strauss' work actually provides very useful insights on that matter.

There are several ways to understand the difference between scientists and writers. One can contrast their methods and stage the difference as an opposition between explanation and interpretation. In this respect, literature is part of a general field devoted to understanding, as opposed to an explanation through causes and effects: the scientists are discovering laws where the writers are creating meaning. One can contrast their objects of study. This is a more romantic version of the divide: the principles of nature against the torments of the human heart; the fatality of the natural world against the unpredictability of human consciousness and action.

Finally, one can contrast their use of language—this is the most fashionable and common way to frame the opposition today: scientists use language as an instrument, in order to convey content and a clear message. For writers, language is not an instrument; it is the very substance of creation. It is Roland Barthes who framed the most sophisticated version of this distinction by opposing *écrivains* and *écrivains*, authors and writers. Scientists, says Barthes, have a non-problematic relationship with language whereas writers refuse to use language as a transparent medium; on the contrary, they play on its inherent opacity in order to raise questions about the way it shapes our world. The writer (*l'écrivain*) is teacher, scientist or anyone trying to transmit non-ambiguous information; even when he asks questions, his use of language is always assertive. As for the author (*l'écrivain*), he is renouncing any message; he uses the language as the sculptor uses the stone and this use is always interrogative, even when he asserts: 'The author radically absorbs the world's *why* in a *how to write*?'

As relevant as these distinctions may be to a certain extent, it may be worth remembering here a lesson of structural anthropology which considers not the content of an opposition but the way it functions and relates to other differences. It might be useful not to take the divide as natural and not to try to load it with positive content but to see how it relates to other differences. Indeed, when Cuvier dismisses Buffon as a scientist and promotes him as a writer, he is not distinguishing between two types of writings but between *two ways to relate them to time*: 'we now know that Buffon was deluding himself about the nature of organic molecules, but he will remain as one of our *immortal* writers.' In modern times, the identification of science, the very use of the adjective *scientific* is always indexed to a certain state of knowledge and to a progressive history. It is so pervasive that we don't even pay attention to it but any writing on a scientific matter or on science itself is always

permeated with adverbs of time, always assuming a historical trend in which it locates itself: 'we now know...', 'we came to realize...', 'some still think that...'. And we can already note that the question 'what remains?' is, in its very form, assuming a progressive history which is typical of modernity.

There is another implication as well: if science is progressing, it means that the scientific content can be transmitted and passed down; in other words, the scientific text is translatable. Science and literature thus depend on two different temporal dimensions or two modes of time: on the one hand, the inescapable obsolescence of the scientific text; on the other hand, the permanence of the untranslatable work. Not only was Newton's work doomed to be surpassed from the very beginning, not only is a current graduate in physics more trained than Newton ever was, but Newton can be translated and summarized without any damage, which is not true of Homer, Balzac or Joyce. That is, I think, what Foucault had in mind when he was trying to shed light on the status of the scientific author: re-reading Newton today might lead us to reconsider the history of physics, but it will never change physics itself. The scientifically relevant content of Newton's text has been totally absorbed in the progress of physics. If we re-read Newton's work now, it cannot be for scientific motives.

In this respect, the distinction between *écrivains* and *écrivains* is not the most profound or the most fundamental. It is just a modern attempt to essentialize a cultural distinction. That being said, I don't mean that there is no difference between the scientist and the writer; there are indeed a lot, but what is most important is not an assortment of texts among which one could arbitrarily draw a line separating scientific from creative writings; what is most essential is the difference itself. To me, one of Lévi-Strauss' work's greatest contributions is to show not that this divide is arbitrary or random, but that, to be fully understood, it needs to be related to other oppositions.

In other words, I believe we can think through this entry into the Pléiade in a way that is not in tension with Lévi-Strauss's thinking but rather in a way that exploits it, and that we can use his work to rethink 'Buffon's model' (or the conversion of a text which *once* was scientific into a *timeless* monument) and to rethink the divide between science and literature.

Lévi-Strauss does not contest the divide but he allows us to think of it as a local version of some—if not universal, at least very widespread—patterns, by paralleling it with other divides in non-modern societies. I would like to stress two elements in Lévi-Strauss' work which are instructive in this respect.

The first one is his reflection on historical models. Lévi-Strauss is famous for having coined the distinction between what he calls 'cold' and 'hot' societies, basically non-modern or 'primitive' societies and cumulative modern societies. *Cold societies*, he argued, are like mechanical machines, such as clocks. They begin with a set amount of energy, and they continue to operate at the same level until some readjustment is necessary. *Hot societies* are like steam engines. They can do far more work than mechanical machines but they rapidly use up their energy and they must be constantly resupplied. Thus, 'hot' societies are constantly changing and have a clearly visible history, whereas cold societies resist change and attempt to continue operating in the same energy-conserving patterns as long as possible.

I won't have time here to enter the anthropological debate about this distinction. Contrary to what has often been said, Lévi-Strauss never stated that 'hot' societies were situated in history whereas 'cold' societies were situated outside of history; all societies are situated in history but what he calls 'cold' societies try to erase time and its effects altogether, especially through rituals and mythic recitations. Their customs, religious system and social organization stress stability and permanence rather than change and evolution.

And their entire ideology strives to negate the very possibility of something like a *historical event*. Let's just keep in mind that there are no pure 'cold' or 'hot' societies. All societies try to solve the inherent contradiction between permanence and irreversibility, between natural cycles and linear decay—or linear progress for that matter. But for the same reason, it would be a mistake to think of modern societies as entirely 'hot' or entirely cumulative. Instead, what is typical of modernity is not the assumption of a progressive history, but the special balance between a dominant historical trend dictated by the unquestionable progress of science and technology and the maintaining of some areas of permanence—namely artistic monuments. Even scientists like Cuvier, even the most radical advocates of progress always recognize that there are regions which escape from the diktat of constant renewal and from the erasing of the past by the present. In this respect, our divide between science and literature can be seen as the modern version of a line drawn by every society between permanence and linearity. From an anthropological perspective, art in modern societies is just the sanctuary of 'coldness' in predominantly 'hot' societies.

Another aspect of Lévi-Strauss' work might help us to re-qualify the divide between science and literature: his reflection on art. Modernity has defined art by the medium. The modern writer like the modern painter is no longer bound by the requirement of representation. Modernism claims to have freed itself from the constraints of pure depiction and seeks to focus instead on the exploration of the specific formal possibilities offered by each medium: language for the writer, colour and texture for the painter, and so on. But Lévi-Strauss shows that there is no such thing as a naïve art which would be captive to its concern for representation (either of natural or supernatural entities) and then, afterwards, a freer art which would liberate itself from such a concern and suddenly realize, through some leap of self-awareness, that the medium is

not transparent. Through some decisive ethnographical analysis, Lévi-Strauss shows that the so-called 'primitive' or 'tribal' art does not ignore the opacity or the resistance of the medium, nor does classical figurative art. Every art form in every culture is engaging with the contingent and trying to make sense of contingency. This is the central thesis of the first chapter of *The Savage Mind* with its famous analysis of the small-scale model or miniature: every art is negotiating a balance between a reference, a medium and a function and the tendency of modernity to privilege the medium at the expense of the two others is just an option among others.

This, of course, merits further development and explanation but we can jump directly to the conclusion: 'Art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought' (*The Savage Mind*). It is a typically modern view to think of a two-fold divide between art and science. Lévi-Strauss encourages us to think rather in terms of a triadic distribution: art occupying an intermediary position between scientific thought and mythical thought.

Thus, there is a sort of permeability between art and science. Lévi-Strauss's most recent books—such as *The Story of the Lynx* or *Look, Listen, Read*—offer numerous and striking examples of passages from Delacroix's painting to fractal theory or from Rimbaud's poetry to recent discoveries in neurology. What matters is not that literature precedes or anticipates a science (which sooner or later will become obsolete) but the very possibility of a transition between the two orders. The two orders are separate, but it is possible to reconstruct and imagine intellectual transformations leading from one to the other. The work of art provides a sensitive synthesis of properties that science tries to isolate analytically. There is no rupture or conflict between science and art; the aesthetic experience is always an experience of knowledge. While science brings to light properties of matter or of the human mind, while mythical thought organizes the world with the data of sensory experience, art operates

within the variety of the sensory world (such as mythical thought or 'bricolage') but, at the same time, constructs objects which, for the audience or the reader, are the occasion for both a sensory and intellectual experience. In a synthesis immediately given to perception, 'knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts'—to quote the famous phrase of *The Savage Mind*.

Thus, scientific thought is not a unique and autonomous intellectual activity, radically cut off from the other operations of the mind. There is no ontological rupture between art, myth and science. I quote from *Tristes tropiques*:

the work of the painter, the poet or the musician, like the myths and symbols of the savage, ought to be seen by us, if not as a superior form of knowledge, at least as the most fundamental and the only one really common to us all; scientific thought [being] merely the sharp point, more penetrating because it has been whetted on the stone of fact, but at the cost of some loss of substance.

I am well aware that these two aspects of Lévi-Strauss' work—his reflection on temporal models or on the relationship between art, scientific and mythical thoughts—merit further exploration. But at least the combination of these aspects provides grounds for rethinking the great divide between science and literature. Again, my purpose here is not to dismiss this divide as such, by saying, for example, that scientists (and especially social scientists) are writers like others and that, basically, all of them are engaged in the same task of writing persuasive fictions. Nor is it to reinforce the divide by saying that literature offers a specific and mysterious knowledge about man that social sciences will never grasp. It is just to think of this divide as relational to other divides—between progress and memory, between the translatable and the untranslatable, between the document and the monument, and so on. It is also a warning against any attempt to essentialize this divide either by reserving certain objects as literary

and others as scientific or by defining science and literature by two different relationships to language. Science and literature might well define one another but neither the former nor the latter is an entity whose content or form can be predicted.

★ ★ ★

So to return to the original question, what does this anniversary and this entry into the Pléiade mean? Maybe simply the following: neither the blurring of the distinction between literature and social sciences, nor a consecration of literature *above* social sciences but, rather than a major turning point, a slight displacement, a subtle move which makes apparent some cultural divisions we take for granted, an opportunity to re-think the distribution of science and literature by paralleling it with other divides in non-modern societies.

As I said, this question about the meaning of the anniversary is also very simple, very concrete: why would I read Lévi-Strauss today? And this question is at once the most important and the hardest to answer. I would say that reading Lévi-Strauss is both an extremely demanding and an extremely rewarding experience. The richness of his work is precisely in this combination of rigour and pleasure and, to me, there is no reason to dismiss perishable knowledge so as to keep timeless style because if there is one lesson we should hold on to from his thought, it is that style and knowledge cannot be separated, and that our experience of art is always also an experience of knowledge.

In *Race and History*, Lévi-Strauss compares history to a card game with some sequences of accumulation and some moments of redistribution, some sequences of homogenization and some moves back to the diversity of the original hands that were dealt. If I can maintain the metaphor, then I would like to think of the 2008 anniversary not as a decisive shift, but maybe as a new hand being dealt and an invitation to play new games.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1972 [1960]. 'Authors and writers', *Critical Essays*. Trans. Richard Howard. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Charbonnier, Georges. 1969 [1961]. *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. London: Cape.
- Cuvier, Georges. 1861 [1826]. 'Éloge historique de Lacépède, lu le 5 juin 1826', *Recueil des éloges historiques lus dans les séances publiques de l'Institut de France*. Paris: Firmin-Didot.
- Debaene, Vincent. 2010. *L'Adieu au voyage. L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature*, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984 [1969]. 'What Is an Author?', trans. Josue Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Kaplan, Alice and Roussin, Philippe. 1996. 'A changing idea of literature: the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', *Yale French Studies*, no. 89.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963 [1956]. 'Do Dual Organizations Exist?', *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1966 [1962]. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1973 [1955]. *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman. London: Cape.
- . 1976 [1952]. 'Race and History', in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2. Trans. Monique Layton. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1976 [1960]. 'The Scope of Anthropology', in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2. Trans. Monique Layton. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1995 [1991]. *Story of Lynx*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1997 [1993]. *Look, Listen, Read*, trans. Brian C.J. Singer. New York: Basic Books.