Claude Lévi-Strauss

The Formative Years

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Contents

1 The place of anthropology

> On entrevoit ainsi le bizarre carrefour de disciplines où se trouve aujourd'hui placée l'anthropologie.
>
> (We perceive the singular crossroads of disciplines at which anthropology stands.)[1]

The publication of *Anthropologie structurale* in 1958 can be viewed as a defining moment in the history of French anthropology. The title of the work is itself a provocative statement of intention. The epithet '*structurale*' signals the resolutely theoretical approach Lévi-Strauss was proposing for his discipline, but no less bold perhaps is the very designation of this discipline as *anthropologie*. The more common term in France was *ethnologie*, and his preference for *anthropologie* therefore marks a conscious decision to widen the normal definition of the discipline.[2] The distinction he makes in the book between three moments or stages of anthropological enquiry is clear enough: ethnography, the empirical instance of observation in the field, is followed by ethnology, the preliminary synthesis of data provided by ethnography, both of which are subsumed in the global perspective on humankind offered by anthropology (*SA*1, 355; *AS*1, 388). By itself this proposed extension of the scope of French ethnology, by analogy with its British and American counterparts, seems a relatively innocent gesture, but it is far from so if one considers the interdisciplinary context in which it takes place. Not only do Lévi-Strauss's definitions of anthropology, of its object, methods and scope, serve to ensure the internal consistency of the discipline; equally and inseparably they help to determine the *place* of anthropology in relation to a number of neighbouring disciplines, and inevitably this place is a problematic one. On the one hand, there was in France the historical subordination of ethnology to sociology – in this context the new designation of 'anthropology' reads as a kind of declaration

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[1] *SA*1, 368; *AS*1, 403.

[2] It is significant that the entries relating to anthropology in the *Grand Robert* dictionary quote directly from *Anthropologie structurale* for the main substance of their definitions (Alain Rey (ed.), *Le Grand Robert. Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*, 2nd edition (Paris: Robert, 1985)).

of independence. On the other hand, the widened scope of the new anthropology also affects the status of other, less proximate disciplines such as history and philosophy. The situation is complicated by the institutional demarcation between *sciences sociales* and *sciences humaines*, a distinction which, it will be seen, is used by Lévi-Strauss to accentuate the differences between sociology and anthropology.

If one takes into account the interdisciplinary implications of Lévi-Strauss's different descriptions and definitions of anthropology in his earlier work, then his decision to open *Structural Anthropology* with a chapter on history and ethnology is perhaps less surprising than would seem at first glance. In actual fact a good part of the chapter entitled 'History and Anthropology', originally published in 1949,[3] deals with the more circumscribed problem of historical reconstruction in anthropology, considering and criticizing in their turn evolutionist, diffusionist and functionalist approaches to the problem. Moreover, when Lévi-Strauss does come to define the relationship between history and ethnology, it seems that an implicit concern of this definition is the exclusion of a third discipline, sociology.

The chapter begins with an evocation of the situation earlier in the century, when Hauser and Simiand defined the respective methods of their disciplines, history and sociology. However, since that period, and in contrast with the 'modest' and 'lucid' progress of history, sociology has, according to Lévi-Strauss, failed to realize the ambitious programme it had set for itself: 'In this discussion we shall not use the term *sociology*, which has never come to stand, as Durkheim and Simiand hoped it would, for a general science of human behaviour' (*SA*1, 2; *AS*1, 4). In fact, the only notable development in French sociology has come through the remarkable progress of two of its tributaries, ethnology and ethnography (1–2; 3). If the study of so-called 'primitive' societies can one day be integrated with the sociological analysis of 'complex' societies, only then will sociology merit a place at the centre of the social sciences. That point not having yet been reached, sociology in France and elsewhere remains little more than a 'social philosophy', best viewed as a special case of ethnography, which is considerably more advanced in both its results and its methodology (2–3; 4).

From the very first pages of *Structural Anthropology*, therefore, Lévi-Strauss excludes sociology – more precisely in France, post-Durkheimian sociology – from his discussion of the relation between the synchronic and diachronic study of society. History and anthropology remain in the arena, and he goes on to determine their relationship. Contrary to appearances, they are not as different as might be supposed:

[3] *SA*1, 1–27; *AS*1, 3–33.

The fundamental difference between the two disciplines is not one of subject, of goal, or of method. They share the same subject, which is social life; the same goal, which is a better understanding of man; and, in fact, the same method, in which only the proportion of research techniques varies. They differ, principally, in their choice of complementary perspectives: history organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations. (*SA*1, 18; *AS*1, 24–5)

This complementarity is expressed later in the chapter by the figure of Janus: history and anthropology are both going in the same direction, but with different orientations, history looking backwards, anthropology looking forwards (24; 32). The kinship between the two is further emphasized when Lévi-Strauss qualifies that their complementary relationship is not exclusive: there are 'dosages' of each perspective (the conscious and the unconscious) in the two disciplines (23; 30–1).

It is evident that the history Lévi-Strauss associates so closely with anthropology in 'History and Anthropology' is a specific type of history. When at the start of the chapter he refers to history's 'modest' and 'lucid' progress, he seems to be thinking of *la nouvelle histoire* (new history) rather than the more traditional history of events and individuals, focused on the political rather than the social and the cultural spheres (23; 31). What we are in fact presented with then is a 'new' discipline, ethnology, and a 'new' history, as pioneered by the *Annales* school. However, it would be limiting to see in the alliance Lévi-Strauss proposes between history and anthropology simply the expression of a project for future research, a peaceful collaboration in the pursuit of truth. This is because such an alliance is also in a sense a pact of non-aggression, the object of which is the exclusion of a third party, sociology. Lévi-Strauss's pact with history, or rather, a specific kind of history, lays to rest the perennial conflict between history and sociology, but at the same time removes sociology from the centre of the stage. This exclusion becomes definitive in the concluding paragraph of 'History and Anthropology': 'If anthropology and history once begin to collaborate in the study of contemporary societies, it will become apparent that here, as elsewhere, the one science can achieve nothing without the help of the other' (25; 33). Whereas earlier in his argument, Lévi-Strauss was prepared to envisage a future reinstatement of sociology at the centre of the social sciences, here the projected study of contemporary society falls to the coalition of ethnology and history, with no mention of their excluded cousin.

Lévi-Strauss's effective dismissal of sociology in 'History and Anthropology' is symptomatic of the uneasy cohabitation of the two disciplines in France from the late 1940s onwards. Despite what Lévi-Strauss considers to be the relatively undistinguished profile of French sociology since Durkheim, it is clear that institutionally sociology continues to enjoy a certain pre-eminence due precisely to the earlier success of the Durkheimian school, and that it therefore

occupies part of the terrain Lévi-Strauss sees as belonging to his new discipline, anthropology. In a later chapter of *Structural Anthropology* he notes, rather euphemistically, that the relationship between sociology and anthropology is an 'equivocal' one (361–2; 395). On a more concrete level this ambivalence can be seen in his relations with the Russian-born sociologist Georges Gurvitch. After the war Gurvitch had emerged as the leading figure in French sociology, occupying the chair at the Sorbonne until his death in 1965. In 1945 he had asked Lévi-Strauss to write the chapter on French sociology for the volume he was to edit on twentieth-century sociology.[4] In the wide-ranging survey he produced, Lévi-Strauss's summary of Gurvitch's contribution to the discipline was a qualified and not particularly enthusiastic one.[5] A few years later, Gurvitch asked Lévi-Strauss to write the introduction to the first published collection of Mauss's works, but in Gurvitch's short preface to the book he carefully dissociated himself from the 'very personal' perspective of the author.[6] In the ensuing years, relations between the two men were to deteriorate rapidly; Gurvitch's criticisms of the concept of structure, for example, provoked a particularly acerbic response from Lévi-Strauss.[7] Finally, in 1959, Gurvitch attempted to exclude Lévi-Strauss from the official celebration of the centenary of Durkheim's birth.[8] The conflict between sociology and anthropology, or at least between two of their principal representatives, Lévi-Strauss and Gurvitch, was therefore a very real one. Lévi-Strauss's meagre estimation of the progress of sociology in 'History and Anthropology' can only have irritated a Gurvitch intent on preserving the place of his discipline at the centre of the social sciences.[9]

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[4] 'French Sociology', in Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert E. Moore (eds.) *Sociology in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), pp. 503–37; French translation *La Sociologie au XXe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), pp. 513–45.

[5] *Sociology in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 532–3; *La Sociologie au XXe siècle*, pp. 540–1.

[6] The detail of the context surrounding the publication of *Sociologie et anthropologie* in 1950 is inevitably lost in the presentation of the English translations of Mauss's essays. The translations of Lévi-Strauss's Introduction and three of Mauss's essays (*The Gift, Seasonal Variations, A General Theory of Magic*) have all been published separately, while translations of the remaining essays are regrouped under another title (*Sociology and Psychology*). Gurvitch's short preface disappears altogether. The effect of this reorganization of the text is to lose the ambivalence of the original title, the dissonance between preface and introduction, and the context of incipient rivalry between Gurvitch and Lévi-Strauss.

[7] Chapter 16 of *Structural Anthropology*.

[8] See the opening footnote to 'What Ethnology Owes to Durkheim' in *Structural Anthropology 2* (*SA2*, 44n; *AS2*, 57 n.1). See also *CLS*2, 69–70; *PL*, 102–3.

[9] Already, in 1950, Gurvitch is asserting this centrality: 'For all of these reasons, sociology should take a central place in the system of knowledge in the second half of the twentieth century, without necessarily returning to the "imperialist" claims that marked its beginnings, nor with the wish of assimilating this or that branch of the social sciences or philosophy. It seems equally certain that sociology will prefer to concentrate its efforts not on society's past history, nor even on already crystallized social situations and structures, but on present society in the very process of its self-creation, with all its struggles and turmoil' (Georges Gurvitch (ed.), *La Vocation actuelle de la sociologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. 4. My translation).

Before going on to consider in more detail Lévi-Strauss's attempted marginalization of sociology, it could be asked what the implications of the pact or collaboration he proposes in 'History and Anthropology' are for history itself. While the relationship he describes appears to be an equal and reciprocal one, the perspective inevitably remains that of an anthropologist and not a historian. It would be useful therefore to consider briefly the case of Lévi-Strauss's opposite number in history, Fernand Braudel. In the same way that Gurvitch provides a counterpoint to Lévi-Strauss in sociology, very quickly Braudel assumes the role of spokesperson for history. The texts he publishes in the late 1950s on history and the human sciences are visibly written in the wake of *Structural Anthropology*, and could be seen at least in part as a response to its challenge.[10] By contrast with Gurvitch, however, the response is generally a positive and constructive one. Braudel welcomes Lévi-Strauss's attempts to give some theoretical coherence to the social sciences, which he (Braudel) considers to be in dire need of a common language, and even goes so far as to call his own approach to history, focused on *la longue durée* (long duration), a 'structural' history.[11] More generally, Braudel and Lévi-Strauss could be seen as fellow travellers to the extent that both share a mistrust of a traditional (political) history that privileges the event and neglects other levels of social reality. At the same time, however, Braudel questions the applicability within historical research of the kind of formalization Lévi-Strauss is proposing for anthropology, and reminds us that Lévi-Strauss's structural models are only properly understood when placed in the enveloping context of *longue durée*.[12]

These last two restrictions are sufficient reminder that while open to the interdisciplinary challenge of Lévi-Strauss's programme for anthropology, Braudel is also concerned to ensure the integrity and centrality of his own discipline. In fact, Braudel's view of what he terms *les sciences de l'homme* – the sciences of man – is notably more inclusive than Lévi-Strauss's. If he is willing to view Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology in a favourable light, he does not share the latter's dismissive attitude towards post-Durkheimian French sociology, and even manages to reconcile the two in his 1958 text on history and sociology, where he refers to Gurvitch and Lévi-Strauss as representatives of the different theoretical tendencies in sociology with which history might profitably collaborate. It is with a degree of impatience, it seems, that he summarizes the contrasting approaches of the two rivals:

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[10] These articles are gathered together under the heading 'History and the Other Human Sciences', in the first section of *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); 'L'Histoire et les autres sciences de l'homme' in *Ecrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 1969).

[11] Ibid., p. 74; p. 112.

[12] Ibid., pp. 75–6; p. 114. In his interview with Lévi-Strauss, Didier Eribon questions him on the suggestion made by some that Braudel's article on *la longue durée* was written to counter Lévi-Strauss's influence on historians (*CLS*2, 123; *PL*, 172).

Georges Gurvitch is almost excessive and overscrupulous in his desire for a complex, hyperempirical sociology, in the image of what he not unreasonably sees as an abundant reality. Claude Lévi-Strauss cuts through this abundance and destroys it in order to bring to light the deep-seated, slender line of human continuity. Does one really absolutely have to choose and decide which one of them is *the* sociologist?[13]

What emerges from this discussion and Braudel's other writings on history and the social sciences is a history wishing to avoid the imperialistic ambitions of its past but which nevertheless sees itself as the natural point of intersection of a number of different disciplines. Whereas the centrality Lévi-Strauss is claiming for anthropology is in large part justified by its strong theoretical bias, the centrality Braudel envisages for history seems to be for the opposite reason: as the least 'structured' of the humanistic sciences, it is able to learn from and reflect the progress of its neighbours.[14] At the same time, he argues that awareness of the temporal dimension, more precisely of the *plurality* of time – his own concept and history's contribution – is essential to the creation of a common methodology for the human and social sciences.[15]

Braudel's picture of the human and social sciences is inevitably a more ecumenical one than either Gurvitch or Lévi-Strauss's. He is obviously attempting to think beyond the border conflicts that seem to characterize relations between these disciplines at this point, as is evident in his conclusion to 'History and Sociology':

> On the practical level . . . I would hope that the social sciences, at least provisionally, would suspend their constant border disputes over what is or is not a social science, what is or is not structure. Rather let them try to trace those lines across our research which if they exist would serve to orient some kind of collective research, and make possible the first stages of some sort of coming together.[16]

Like Lévi-Strauss, then, Braudel wishes for a certain convergence of the social sciences. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, he does not wish this to be at the price of the virtual exclusion of one of its members. Though the 'structural' history of Braudel's *longue durée* seems both theoretically and temperamentally closer to Lévi-Strauss than to Gurvitch, it is significant that Lévi-Strauss's proposal for an exclusive collaboration between anthropology and the new history finds no direct echo in Braudel's text.

That all three disciplines – history, sociology, anthropology – should in their different ways be claiming a place at the centre of the human or social sciences, is a reflection of how contested this terrain had become in postwar France.

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[13] *On History*, p. 73; *Ecrits sur l'histoire*, p. 111. First published in Gurvitch's *Traité de sociologie*, vol. I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 83–98.

[14] *On History*, pp. 26, 70; *Ecrits sur l'histoire*, pp. 42, 106–7.

[15] Ibid., p. 26; p. 43.   [16] Ibid., p. 52; pp. 82–3.

The spirit of rivalry and of jealously guarded borders has doubtless always been a feature of relations between cognate disciplines, but the situation at this particular time seems an unusually volatile one. A significant factor here was clearly the arrival of this 'new' discipline, anthropology, especially in the form Lévi-Strauss was proposing for it.[17] He himself was fully aware of the difficult and ambivalent position of anthropology. In the final chapter of *Structural Anthropology*, 'The Place of Anthropology in the Social Sciences' (1954),[18] he uses a cosmological metaphor to describe its equivocal arrival:

It is as though social and cultural anthropology, far from appearing on the scene of scientific development as an independent subject claiming a place among the other disciplines, had taken shape somewhat in the manner of a nebula, gradually incorporating a substance previously diffused or distributed in another way and, by this concentration, bringing about a general redistribution of research subjects among the humanistic and social sciences. (*SA*1, 347; *AS*1, 378)

This metaphor describes what is basically a double-bind situation: anthropology is unable simply to impose itself as an autonomous discipline – it must negotiate the context of adjacent disciplines and the history of its emergence in relation to those disciplines. At the same time, as the nebular metaphor implies, the rightful place of anthropology is at the centre of these disciplines: it incorporates diffusely distributed matter and achieves a certain critical mass, in the process redrawing the map of the social and human sciences. Though the metaphor is suitably vague, it is not difficult to see that the realignment described would concern those disciplines seen as being closest to anthropology: history and, especially, sociology.

It is important to remember here that the social and cultural anthropology Lévi-Strauss is describing is distinct from ethnology as traditionally practised in France. If anthropology occupies or ought to occupy a central position within the human and social sciences, then this means that it cannot simply be equated with ethnology, the study of exotic societies, even if historically this is its provenance. The general anthropology which Lévi-Strauss is projecting here, and in other similarly programmatic texts of the same period, would be applicable to *all* societies. The object of anthropology, he stresses, is not simply the 'primitive': 'It is important to realize, from the outset, that anthropology is not distinguished from other humanistic and social sciences by any subject of study peculiar to

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[17] One would have to return to the beginning of the century to find an analogous situation in France, where Durkheim's construction of sociology posed similar problems of demarcation from cognate disciplines such as history, philosophy, ethnography and law. See Victor Karady, 'Durkheim, les sciences sociales et l'Université: bilan d'un semi-échec', *Revue française de sociologie* 17.2 (April–June 1976), 278–9 n.33; 'Stratégies de réussite et modes de faire-valoir de la sociologie chez les durkheimiens', *Revue française de sociologie* 20.1 (January–March 1979), 53.

[18] (*SA*1, 346–81; *AS*1, 377–418). First published in 'The University Teaching of the Social Sciences' (Paris: UNESCO, 1954).

it alone. At first, indeed, it was concerned with so-called savage or primitive societies' (347; 378). He goes on to argue that

- the interest in exotic cultures is in any case shared by an increasing number of disciplines;
- the societies traditionally studied by ethnologists are rapidly disappearing;
- as a consequence of this, anthropologists are now turning to 'civilized' societies as objects of study;[19]
- and finally, that rather than arising from its object of study (the 'primitive') the specificity of anthropology resides in 'a particular conception of the world or . . . an original way of approaching problems', acquired in the study of qualitatively different societies (*SA*1, 347; *AS*1, 378–9).

The final point, emphasizing the originality of anthropology's research methods, is essential to understanding how Lévi-Strauss effectively contests the place of sociology at the centre of the social sciences. It will become apparent that while, as is clear in this instance, anthropology and sociology might potentially share the same object (society in general), for Lévi-Strauss they are distinct in their aims and methods, and that it is this distinction which enables him to establish an implicit hierarchy of disciplines, premised on the values of *objectivity* and *authenticity*.

However, the ideal position or evolution of anthropology, expressed in this passage, is in sharp contrast with both its history and its actual predicament: 'Anthropology is too young a science for its teaching not to reflect the local and historical circumstances that are at the root of each particular development' (348; 379). The institutional reality of the teaching of anthropology is that it is grouped with various of the other social sciences, and most frequently with sociology (ibid.). In this passage, therefore, Lévi-Strauss oscillates between what anthropology is and what it ought to or will be, between the ideal and the actual. Inevitably, what appears to interest him most is the future of anthropology, what it promises, rather than the reality of its present entrenchment within the social sciences.

This brings us to the question of the relationship between the so-called 'social' and 'human' sciences, and the exact location of anthropology within them. Braudel, as has been seen, normally brings the two together under the more general and more inclusive description, *les sciences de l'homme*, the sciences of man. For anthropology, Lévi-Strauss appears to modulate between the two

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[19] 'As anthropology deepens its reflections on its subject and improves its methods, it feels more and more that it is "going back home" ' (376; 413). According to Gérard Althabe, however, the effect of Lévi-Strauss's formulation of anthropology as a science of cultural distanciation was to downgrade the ethnological study of French society, as it had traditionally been practised, in favour of an ethnology of the exotic ('Vers une ethnologie du présent', in Gérard Althabe, Daniel Fabre and Gérard Lenclud (eds.), *Vers une ethnologie du présent* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1992), p. 249).

terms, with, it seems, an increasing bias towards 'human' as opposed to 'social' science.[20] The most coherent articulation of the distinction between the two is to be found in a later text, 'Scientific Criteria in the Social and Human Disciplines' (1964), subsequently published in *Structural Anthropology 2*. While, as its title suggests, this text is not concerned exclusively with the example of anthropology, the series of divisions, subdivisions and oppositions Lévi-Strauss posits both within and between the social and human sciences on the one hand, and the 'exact' sciences on the other, are very instructive as to how he views anthropology and sociology as, respectively, 'human' and 'social' sciences.

The text itself was originally a response to a survey initiated by UNESCO on the principal trends of research in the human and social sciences, following a similar survey on the state of the natural sciences. From the start, Lévi-Strauss makes clear that the 'science' ascribed to the various social and humanistic disciplines is a semantic fiction, more a reflection of their aspiration to science than their actual attainment of it. Moreover, amongst the disparate mass of disciplines gathered together under the rubric of 'human and social sciences', only a few can claim a method approximating that of science (*SA2*, 290, 291; *AS2*, 341, 342). Lévi-Strauss mentions two criteria defining the scientific approach: first, the necessity of the distinction or separation ('dualism') between observer and object of observation; second, the capacity to isolate simple, invariant structures across a range of phenomena (292–3; 343–5). He suggests that linguistics, and to a lesser extent ethnology, have gone some way to meeting the second of these criteria, but in order to properly evaluate the diverse claims to science of the social and human disciplines, he thinks it is first necessary to address the problem of their *classification*. The passage in question merits quotation in full, as it represents a peculiarly 'Lévi-Straussian' solution to the problem:

In truth, this problem of the classification of the social and human sciences has never been treated seriously.

But the brief recapitulation which we have presented in order to point out the ambiguities, confusions, and contradictions in nomenclature, shows that nothing can be attempted on the basis of recognized divisions. We must first start with an epistemological criticism of our sciences, in the hope that, in spite of their empirical diversity and heterogeneity, a small number of fundamental attitudes will emerge. Their presence, absence or combination will make the peculiarity or the complementarity of each one clearer than its goal, openly and confusedly proclaimed. (*SA2*, 297; *AS2*, 349)

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[20] The history of the two terms in France is a rather complicated one. The term *sciences humaines* has existed since the seventeenth century, initially designating the study of language, grammar, poetry and rhetoric. It is only in the twentieth century that it acquires a new meaning, close to that of the *sciences sociales*, which appears to have been borrowed from the English language ('Science' in Alain Rey (ed.), *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, 2 vols., 13th edition (Paris: Robert, 2000)). Lévi-Strauss uses the ambiguous distinction between the two terms in order to interpolate his own definition of their respective fields of reference.

It is not difficult to see that what Lévi-Strauss is proposing here is a *structural* analysis of the social and human sciences. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* and *Totemism*, for example, exactly the same terms are used to describe the state of kinship studies and theories of totemism: a profusion of empirical data and of hypotheses on the data; the necessity of bringing some order to this chaos, of cutting through the complexity of superficial phenomena in order to arrive at simpler, underlying configurations. In the present case, these configurations are the limited set of 'fundamental attitudes' supposed to underlie the diverse orientations of the various disciplines. There is also the implication that these attitudes operate on an unconscious level: what might be consciously but vaguely articulated as the aims and objectives of the different disciplines are subtended by more essential and unconscious tendencies. This is of course one of the central premises of structural analysis, that conscious representations – 'secondary elaborations' – are not necessarily to be trusted and that the truly fundamental structures lie at a deeper level of determination.

Significantly, Lévi-Strauss begins his structural analysis of the social and human sciences by reviving a previous analysis made in *Structural Anthropology* of the relationship between anthropology, sociology and history (*SA*1, 285–6; *AS*1, 313–14). So within the wider community of the human and social sciences, we are returned to the more restricted, 'nuclear' family of history, anthropology and sociology, already examined in 'History and Anthropology'. The criteria for analysis in this case are the following: the presence or absence of empirical observation, the construction of models and (within this category) the use of what Lévi-Strauss terms 'mechanical' or 'statistical' models (*SA*2, 297; *AS*2, 349).[21] He suggests that we 'arbitrarily' assign a positive or a negative to each discipline, in so far as it satisfies one or another of these criteria. The result is a table in which each of the four disciplines (anthropology breaks down into two parts or stages, ethnography and ethnology) has its specific place, distinguished from or associated with its neighbour by a plus or a minus sign (see table 1).

This table could be extended and complicated by introducing further oppositional criteria, and also by applying these to other disciplines. One therefore obtains a kind of periodic table in which each discipline has its assigned place: 'It would then be seen that in relation to all these opposites, the disciplines have their place well marked, positively or negatively' (ibid.). As with the periodic

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[21] 'A last distinction refers to the relation between the scale of the model and that of the phenomena. A model the elements of which are on the same scale as the phenomena will be called a "mechanical model". When the elements of the model are on a different scale, we shall be dealing with a "statistical model"' (*SA*1, 283; *AS*1, 311). A few pages later, Lévi-Strauss qualifies that 'the social sciences, while they have to do with the time dimension, nevertheless deal with two different categories of time. Anthropology uses a "mechanical" time, reversible and non-cumulative . . . On the contrary, historical time is "statistical": it always appears as an oriented and non-reversible process' (*SA*1, 286; *AS*1, 314).

Table 1

	History	Sociology	Ethnography	Ethnology
Empirical observation vs model building	+	−	+	−
Mechanical models vs statistical models	−	−	+	+

Source: SA2, 298; *AS2*, 350.

table of the elements, one would be able to predict the place and properties of disciplines which do not as yet exist, represented by the empty spaces that remain in the present table. It would equally be possible to anticipate the future development of existing disciplines (299; 351).[22]

It is perhaps necessary to pause an instant to consider the implications of Lévi-Strauss's structural classification of the disciplines. Apart from the question of the viability of such a classification, which is far from certain (it is not self-evident, for example, that the diverse conceptual, practical and procedural complexes that constitute different 'disciplines' are reducible to binary categorization), one would also need to ask what its logical status might be. Is it legitimate for a discipline to use its own, internal methods of analysis to categorize itself and cognate disciplines? The discipline in question being anthropology, one could imagine a situation in which such analysis would constitute a *critique* of the disciplines, a reflexive questioning of the demarcations and differences, the divisions and dissensions between disciplines, but this is obviously not the case in the present instance. Lévi-Strauss's binary classification of the disciplines is unmarked, he does not declare its affinity with the method which at this point, in 1964, he has perfected in his analysis of mythological systems and kinship structures. It is as if the method itself has now become self-evident, more precisely, that its *application* is self-evident, regardless of the class of phenomena to which it is applied. This problem of level and of logical type is not an isolated one in Lévi-Strauss's work, and we will return to it more than once in the course of the following chapters. For the moment, it is enough to note that Lévi-Strauss considers one of the virtues of his tabulation of the four disciplines in question (history, sociology, ethnography, ethnology) to be that it resolves the state of conflict which has often existed between them (298; 349). Because each discipline has a precisely defined place, both similar to and distinct from its neighbours, their relationship is one of complementarity, of interlocking boundaries, rather than of conflict. Of course, it could be

[22] The metaphor of the periodic table in this particular instance is mine, though Lévi-Strauss himself uses the analogy on a number of occasions to describe the finite repertories of linguistic and cultural systems. See for example, *TT*2, 178; *TT*1, 205; *SA*1, 58; *AS*1, 66.

argued that the situation described here is non-conflictual precisely because it essentializes the characteristics (the 'fundamental attitudes') of each discipline and abstracts from the actual history of their conflicts. The ideal and ahistorical situation Lévi-Strauss describes therefore reduces present and previous dissent to an underlying harmony – a description which does not, it should be said, take into account the inherent violence of its own categorization of the human and social sciences. Despite the claimed arbitrariness of the positive and negative signs used in the table above, their application to the disciplines in question, in accordance with the specified criteria, cannot be neutral. Inevitably, a hierarchy is implicit in the relative distribution of these signs. At the top of this hierarchy is anthropology, which combines the empirical strengths of ethnography with the 'mechanical' models of ethnology. Next is history, which is based on empirical observation but whose models are only of the approximate, 'statistical' kind. Finally, there is sociology, which, having two minus signs attached to it, is both deprived of an empirical base and, like history, restricted to the formulation of statistical models. The signs themselves are claimed to be arbitrary, but their effect on our perception of the relative positions of these disciplines is not.

The downgrading of sociology implicit in Lévi-Strauss's tabulation of the disciplines is continued when he widens the focus of analysis to include the exact or natural sciences. It is at this point that the closely knit family of disciplines begins to disintegrate (in the original French, the term repeatedly used is *éclater*, to explode, to break up). In a second moment of his analysis or classification, Lévi-Strauss considers whether the human and social sciences have succeeded in attaining a degree of objectivity comparable to that of the natural sciences, if one accepts that the natural sciences are the ideal model of objective research. His response, predictably, is that only post-Saussurean linguistics can be said to have fully satisfied such criteria. Linguistics is therefore the first amongst the 'confused mass' of the human and social sciences to scale the interdisciplinary wall separating them from the exact sciences (299; 351–2). The problem remains, nonetheless, as to how the remainder of disciplines might be categorized: who, asks Lévi-Strauss, is to be the judge? (300–1; 353, 354).[23] His conclusion is that the interdisciplinary bridge between the exact and the human sciences is selective, concerning only the most progressive research programmes (*les recherches 'de pointe'*): 'Thus, in the five cases considered, we are dealing with a research which implies a close collaboration between certain social and human sciences (linguistics, ethnology, psychology, logic, philosophy) and some of the hard sciences (mathematics, human anatomy and physiology, zoology)' (305; 358). On the strength of this close collaboration – for example, the ethnologist and linguist have more in common with

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[23] This question confirms the reader's suspicion that Lévi-Strauss's categorization, like all categorization, also possesses a certain performative (legislative) force.

the neurologist and ethologist than with the economist or political scientist – Lévi-Strauss is able to propose a further subdivision: what he has been referring to more or less conjointly as the human *and* social sciences now breaks down into the human sciences on the one hand, and the social sciences on the other. Detaching from the human and social sciences the arts and literature, which have no aspirations to scientific status, he defines the social sciences as including law, economics, politics and 'some branches of sociology and social psychology', and the human sciences as including prehistory, archaeology and history, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, logic and psychology. Working from this definition, the one basic criterion for the distinction between the social and human sciences becomes apparent, though the distinction itself is based on a difficult truth which is not always willingly acknowledged: the social sciences are firmly established within the society that has produced them, they prepare their students for a practical and professional life in the service of that society, and in this way quite happily serve the status quo. The human sciences, on the other hand, though possessing the same object as the social sciences (humanity and society), offer an external perspective on that object (306–7; 359–60). The terms used by Lévi-Strauss to describe this extra-social viewpoint are interesting: he claims that the human sciences refuse any 'complicity' with or 'indulgence' towards their object of study; they are 'intransigent' in their refusal to involve themselves directly in the affairs of their own society. By virtue of this detached perspective, the human sciences share a greater affinity with the exact sciences than do the social sciences. If the social sciences use technical procedures borrowed from the exact sciences, then such borrowings are 'extrinsic', whereas the human sciences are inspired by the actual methodology of the exact sciences.[24] The human sciences have learnt from the exact sciences that one must pass behind appearances in order to understand (and eventually change) the world, whereas the social sciences accept the world as it is (307–10; 360–3).

Lévi-Strauss's table of disciplines is therefore redrawn in that one now has on the one side the exact and human sciences, and on the other, the social sciences. What before was a 'correlation' between the human and social sciences now becomes, in Lévi-Strauss's words, an 'opposition' (307; 360). Of course, this is all framed in a general description of the various disciplines, but it is clear that in describing the distinctive approach of the human and social sciences, Lévi-Strauss has again placed anthropology and sociology on opposite sides

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[24] The distinction between 'external' and 'internal' is essential to Lévi-Strauss's conception of interdisciplinarity, which does not consist in the superficial borrowings that characterize the normal mode of exchange between various disciplines, but implies a more radical assimilation of new methodologies. Doubtless the future convergence of the sciences – exact, human and social – which Lévi-Strauss so frequently predicts in his earlier texts, depends on such 'internal' communication.

of a disciplinary fence. In fact, this realignment of disciplines echoes other statements he has made on the distinction between sociology and anthropology. The idea of the sociologist's essential implication in society, as opposed to the anthropologist's habitual detachment, was already being put forward in *Structural Anthropology*:

If a French sociologist of the twentieth century works out a general theory of social life, it will inevitably and quite legitimately (for this attempted distinction is in no way a criticism)[25] reveal itself as the work of a twentieth-century French sociologist; whereas the anthropologist undertaking the same task will endeavour, instinctively and deliberately . . . to formulate a theory applicable not only to his own fellow countrymen and contemporaries, but to the most distant native population. (*SA*1, 362–3; *AS*1, 396–7)

He goes on to conclude that the distanced or defamiliarized perspective offered by anthropology, with its observation and description of 'strange and remote societies', means that its analyses are of a greater level of generality than those of sociology: 'We see therefore why sociology can be regarded, and rightly regarded, sometimes as a special form of anthropology . . . and sometimes as the discipline which occupies first place in the hierarchy of the social sciences; for it undoubtedly occupies not merely a particular position but a *position of privilege*' (363; 397). This is an interesting manoeuvre: on the one hand, sociology is a special case of anthropology, a subset of that discipline; on the other hand, it is a privileged case in that in regional terms (within the social sciences) it is the master discipline. It has the internal rigour of Euclidean geometry, if one accepts its limited perspective, while anthropology would be comparable to a non-Euclidean geometry.[26] The point is that this manoeuvre places anthropology above sociology but at the same time apart from it, so that one could say of Lévi-Strauss's anthropology that its circumference is everywhere but its centre nowhere.

This description of the place of anthropology, within a certain topography of the human and social sciences, needs to be qualified. The fact that in both volumes of *Structural Anthropology* Lévi-Strauss conceives of anthropology as a more general science of humanity and society than sociology does not mean that anthropology is simply a more abstract moment of socio-anthropological thought. If, as defined above, anthropology as a human science is considered to be closer to the natural sciences, by virtue of its supposed detachment from its object, then it is again more scientific in comparison with the social sciences in that ethnography, the collection of data in the field, anchors anthropology firmly

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[25] The remark in parentheses is omitted in the translation.
[26] The analogy is Lévi-Strauss's. Lévi-Strauss is frequently given to comparing what he considers the novel or non-conventional (decentring and generalizing) perspective of structural anthropology to the perspectival revolutions in the history of the exact sciences: the Copernican revolution, general relativity or, as is the case here, non-Euclidean geometry. See also, *CLS*1, 17–18; *EC*, 17–18.

in the concrete. Anthropology is therefore, via ethnography, closer to the 'real' and the particular, while at the same time providing a more powerful description of humanity in general. The insistence on the concrete basis of anthropological knowledge is an important component in Lévi-Strauss's demarcation of anthropology from sociology and other disciplines. In the passage quoted above, for example, he reminds us that 'In some countries, particularly in continental Europe ... sociology follows the tradition of a social philosophy, in which knowledge (acquired at second or third hand) of concrete research carried out by others serves merely to buttress hypotheses' (362; 395–6). A similar critique is implicit in his distinction between the study of *realia* and *generalia*:

All the disciplines dealing with a concrete subject – be this subject total or partial – are grouped in the same category if we want to distinguish them from other branches of the social and human sciences, which seek to reach less *realia* than *generalia*. For example, social psychology, and no doubt sociology also – if we want to assign to it a specific aim and style which would clearly isolate it from ethnography. (*SA2*, 296; *AS2*, 348)

Contemporary sociology is thus, in Lévi-Strauss's mind, more philosophical and speculative than empirical and objective. Anthropology, on the other hand, subsuming as we have seen the empirical moment of ethnography and its synthesis in ethnology, is a truly objective science. If it is given to abstraction and speculation, then this is only as the result of a faithful and arduous apprenticeship of the concrete (24; 35).[27]

From the texts considered in this chapter, covering the period 1949–64, there emerges therefore a coherent and consistent picture of the place of anthropology and of its specificity as a discipline. However, if the ensemble of texts dealing with the question of the disciplines and the relations between disciplines presents an apparently unified perspective, then this is not entirely without its complications. While, in accordance with the nebular metaphor described above, Lévi-Strauss's apparent ambition for anthropology is for it to occupy a place at the gravitational centre of the human and social sciences, then at the same time his desire is that it should remain somehow *eccentric* in relation to these other disciplines. In this respect, perhaps a more precise metaphor for the place of anthropology is that of the statue or monument described in *Structural Anthropology*: 'It has, as it were, its feet planted on the natural sciences, its back resting against the humanistic studies, and its eyes directed towards the social sciences' (*SA1*, 361; *AS1*, 395). In the light of the 'structural' analysis of the disciplines, examined above, the meaning of this analogy is at first quite

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[27] 'Since the traditional social sciences (sociology, political science, law, and economics) seem incapable of dealing with anything but abstractions, anthropology feels increasingly aware of its traditional calling, which is to constitute a *study of man* in the true sense of the word. Its mission, then, is, in the first place to observe and to describe; secondly to analyse and classify; finally to isolate constants and formulate laws' ('Panorama of Anthropology (1950–1952)', *Diogenes* 2 (Spring 1953), 90; 'Panorama de l'ethnologie (1950–1952)', *Diogène* 2 (April 1953), 121).

clear: anthropology belongs to the human sciences, while it has its feet firmly on the bedrock of the natural sciences (it is based on empirical observation and remains resolutely detached from its object). A problem arises, however, when one considers the third term of the analogy. What does Lévi-Strauss mean when he says that anthropology has its eyes 'directed towards' the social sciences? This image could be said to express the present separation of the human sciences and the social sciences, but also their future reconciliation. Using another of Lévi-Strauss's topographical metaphors, the social sciences are in this sense the *horizon* of anthropology: the terrestrial globe of knowledge being round, the human, exact and social sciences are all destined one day to converge (*SA2*, 311; *AS2*, 364).

But the look cast by anthropology in the direction of the social sciences is a fundamentally ambivalent one. The horizon of convergence projected by Lévi-Strauss is arguably never reached, even by the general anthropology proposed in the two volumes of *Structural Anthropology*. This is not necessarily because of any essential disjuncture between the different disciplines in question, though in retrospect Lévi-Strauss's confidence in the potential of interdisciplinary exchange between the human and natural sciences might seem exaggerated; rather, it is due to Lévi-Strauss's own vision of the place of anthropology as being at the same time a central and a marginal one. From the epistemological and methodological point of view it is central: by comparison with sociology and the social sciences, anthropology is both a more universal and a more down-to-earth (concrete, empirical) discipline. From the point of view of utility or function, on the other hand, anthropology is a marginal discourse. It will be remembered that Lévi-Strauss thinks sociology and the social sciences are essentially conservative in function: their role is not to change or modify the society they describe. Anthropology, by contrast, is more *authentic* than its social scientific cousins in that it is also a potentially radical discourse, a quality which sets it apart from the conventional community of disciplines.

We will be examining Lévi-Strauss's conception of the moral missions of anthropology in chapter 4. In the present context, it is interesting to note that his construction of this decentred anthropology is reflected in his view of the institutional placement of the discipline, briefly set forth in *Structural Anthropology*. On the institutional level, he argues, anthropology cannot merge with the social sciences, which are on the point of gaining independent status within the university system; nor can it attach itself to the arts or science faculties. As he sees it, anthropology falls somewhere between these three faculties, in a kind of institutional no-man's land. The ideal solution, he concludes, would be the school or institute (*SA*1, 361; *AS*1, 394–5). That this effectively places anthropology on the margins of the traditional centres of academic teaching and research in France is no accident. At this point, in 1954, Lévi-Strauss was himself writing from such a position, as a member of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in

Paris. Five years later, his election to the first chair of social anthropology at the Collège de France achieved the institutional visibility he sought for anthropology. Historically, both the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and the Collège de France have been primarily research institutions, separate from the university, and hence free from the constraints and obligations of normal university teaching and administration. Their teaching programmes are based on the research activities of their members rather than on the traditional university syllabus. This position of marginality is also a position of power, as Pierre Bourdieu points out. While members of these institutions might be more or less excluded from the normal decision-making processes in the university, and while the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, for example, was until recently dependent on the university for the validation of its qualifications, both institutions possess considerable symbolic capital in that their members are viewed as constituting the vanguard of knowledge rather than its simple reproduction.[28]

Bourdieu cites Lévi-Strauss as an exemplary case of the intellectual who has pursued a career outside or on the margins of the traditional French university system.[29] Our more general question here is what this might mean for his own discipline, anthropology. If Lévi-Strauss himself comes to occupy the positions of marginal power he projects as being the ideal placement for anthropology, does this express something that is essential to anthropology itself? Again, this is a question which will be treated in subsequent chapters, both in the context of Lévi-Strauss's conception of the missions of anthropology, and in the context of his autobiographical work: the institutional marginality of anthropology noted above also seems, rather paradoxically, to be a reflection of the personal history of the individual Lévi-Strauss. The 'singular crossroads of disciplines at which anthropology stands' in 1954 is equally the singular position of the individual who in the same year will begin writing *Tristes tropiques*.

This chapter has focused on texts dealing with what could be termed the external aspect of anthropology, that is, questions concerning its *interface* with other disciplines rather than the detail of its internal constitution. It has shown Lévi-Strauss's increasing role during the postwar period as the principal spokesperson for French anthropology, who provides a coherent and wide-ranging programme for his discipline and a vision for its future development. As we have seen, this kind of overview does not simply describe the place of the new discipline within a given interdisciplinary context, it also projects the *ideal* place of that discipline in such a context. Inevitably, this process of self-definition entails the redefinition of boundaries with adjacent disciplines. In the specific historical

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[28] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Homo academicus* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984), pp. 140–8; *Homo academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 105–12. See also Victor Karady, 'Durkheim, les sciences sociales et l'Université', 298 n.60, and 'Stratégies de réussite', 62–3.

[29] *Homo academicus*, pp. 142–3; p. 108.

context of postwar France, anthropology's adjacent disciplines are history and sociology. But Lévi-Strauss goes further than simply attempting to free French anthropology from its historical subordination to sociology: he also challenges the place of sociology and history as the traditional centres of social scientific enquiry. It is important in fact to emphasize the extent to which Lévi-Strauss appears to be dictating the terms of the debate between the disciplines at this point. The responses of his counterparts in history and sociology, Braudel and Gurvitch, examined above, would seem for the most part to be reactions to an agenda that he, Lévi-Strauss, has already set. It should also be remembered that what is at stake here is not simply the internal balance of power between disciplines within the university, but their sphere of influence in the wider intellectual constituency which has traditionally been so important in France.[30] In the 1950s and 1960s, for a number of reasons, not the least of which is Lévi-Strauss's astute promotion of his discipline, anthropology becomes in effect one of the essential reference points of intellectual discourse in France. The rise of structuralism, it could be argued, is historically inseparable from the prestige of anthropology as the most theoretically advanced of the human sciences.

The question of the more general field of influence of anthropology brings us to a discipline which has been largely absent, if virtually present, in Lévi-Strauss's definition of the place of anthropology – that is, philosophy. In spite of the apparent rivalry existing between the three 'nuclear' disciplines of history, sociology and anthropology, such competition is nevertheless conducted *en famille*, so to speak. The family, to continue the metaphor, is that of the social and human sciences; despite their quarrels, the aspiration of each is to the scientific treatment of their object, whether that object be society in particular or humanity in general. Braudel, it will be remembered, normally refers to this family as *les sciences de l'homme*, the sciences of man. Lévi-Strauss, more exclusively, prefers to regard sociology as a distant cousin, and thus makes a rigid distinction between the social and human sciences. Hence anthropology is defined as a *science humaine*, but, if one reviews the membership of this side of the family as enumerated above, so is philosophy. One might pause to ask (which Lévi-Strauss, in his somewhat summary classification of the disciplines, does not) whether philosophy is a 'science' in the same way as history, sociology and anthropology have been defined as 'sciences', each of them dealing in its own manner with a determinable body of 'facts'. The response would probably have to be in the negative. The object of philosophy has traditionally included the entirety of what is human, but its style or approach has by no means been restricted to the strictly 'scientific'. In the more circumscribed context of

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In his interview with Didier Eribon, Lévi-Strauss twice refers to the preoccupation of French historians during the 1960s with the popularity of anthropology in this wider, extra-academic sphere (*CLS*2, 65, 123; *PL*, 96, 172).

postwar France, and in the intellectual milieu described above, on the other hand, it is easy to see how anthropology and philosophy become competing discourses, to the extent that Lévi-Strauss's reconstruction of ethnology as anthropology not only displaces sociology but also threatens to absorb philosophy. This is particularly evident if one reconsiders his twofold demarcation of anthropology from sociology, according to which anthropology is both a more objective and a more authentic discipline than sociology because it is not complicit with the social systems it describes. However problematic this assertion may be – at the most simple level the equation between 'distance' and 'objectivity' could be questioned – it is clear that anthropology's claim to a certain critical and ethical status places it on terrain already occupied by philosophy. The virulence of some of the exchanges between the participants in the debate around structuralism in the 1960s owes something at least to the implicitly philosophical programme of Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, as will become apparent in the following chapters.

As stated above, this chapter has focused primarily on the external aspect of anthropology's relations with other disciplines, how Lévi-Strauss's construction of anthropology affects the status and identity of proximate disciplines. This does not mean, of course, that Lévi-Strauss's contribution to sociological theory is of secondary importance; on the contrary, it is an integral part of his determination of the rightful place of anthropology within the human sciences. The claims of anthropology to scientific interest would mean nothing if they were not matched by a coherent theoretical framework. It is to Lévi-Strauss's construction of this framework that we will now turn.