PENGUIN CLASSICS

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

Tristes Tropiques

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TRISTES TROPIQUES

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, the founder of structural anthropology, was born in Belgium in 1908. He studied at the University of Paris, including readings in sociology, took a degree in law and was received at the agrégation in philosophy. After teaching in a lycée, he was appointed in 1934 to a post as Professor of Sociology at the University of São Paulo in Brazil. During his tenure there, he made several expeditions to the country's interior, where he conducted his first fieldwork. In 1941 he began teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York City, and served from 1946 to 1947 as the cultural counsellor to the French embassy in Washington. Lévi-Strauss began publishing his work in the midforties. He was appointed to the specially created Chair of Social Anthropology at the Collège de France in 1959. In 1968 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, and in 1973 he was elected to the French Academy. His many published works include Structural Anthropology; Totemism; The Savage Mind; The Raw and the Cooked; From Honey to Ashes; The Origin of Table Manners; The Naked Man; Myth and Meaning; and Look, Listen, Read. He died on October 30, 2009, a few weeks shy of his 101st birthday.

JOHN WEIGHTMAN and DOREEN WEIGHTMAN together translated several important anthropological works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and a book about Rousseau by Jean Guehenno.

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ALWAYS LEARNING PEARSON

Contents

1. *Setting Out*

I hate travelling and explorers. Yet here I am proposing to tell the story of my expeditions. But how long it has taken me to make up my mind to do so! It is now fifteen years since I left Brazil for the last time and all during this period I have often planned to undertake the present work, but on each occasion a sort of shame and repugnance prevented me making a start. Why, I asked myself, should I give a detailed account of so many trivial circumstances and insignificant happenings? Adventure has no place in the anthropologist's profession; it is merely one of those unavoidable drawbacks, which detract from his effective work through the incidental loss of weeks or months; there are hours of inaction when the informant is not available; periods of hunger, exhaustion, sickness perhaps; and always the thousand and one dreary tasks which eat away the days to no purpose and reduce dangerous living in the heart of the virgin forest to an imitation of military service … The fact that so much effort and expenditure has to be wasted on reaching the object of our studies bestows no value on that aspect of our profession, and should be seen rather as its negative side. The truths which we seek so far afield only become valid when they have been separated from this dross. We may endure six months of travelling, hardships and sickening boredom for the purpose of recording (in a few days, or even a few hours) a hitherto unknown myth, a new marriage rule or a complete list of clan names, but is it worth my while taking up my pen to perpetuate such a useless shred of memory or pitiable recollection as the following: 'At five thirty in the morning, we entered the harbour at Recife amid the shrill cries of the gulls, while a fleet of boats laden with tropical fruits clustered round the hull'?

Nevertheless, this kind of narrative enjoys a vogue which I, for my part, find incomprehensible. Amazonia, Tibet and Africa fill the bookshops in the form of travelogues, accounts of expeditions and collections of photographs, in all of which the desire to impress is so dominant as to make it impossible for the reader to assess the value of the evidence put before him. Instead of having his critical faculties stimulated, he asks for more

such pabulum and swallows prodigious quantities of it. Nowadays, being an explorer is a trade, which consists not, as one might think, in discovering hitherto unknown facts after years of study, but in covering a great many miles and assembling lantern-slides or motion pictures, preferably in colour, so as to fill a hall with an audience for several days in succession. For this audience, platitudes and commonplaces seem to have been miraculously transmuted into revelations by the sole fact that their author, instead of doing his plagiarizing at home, has supposedly sanctified it by covering some twenty thousand miles.

What do we learn from these illustrated lectures, and what do we find in the travel books? We are told the exact number of packing-cases that was required, or about the misdemeanours of the ship's dog, and, interspersed among the anecdotes, are scraps of hackneyed information which have appeared in every textbook during the past fifty years and are presented with remarkable effrontery (an effrontery nevertheless perfectly in keeping with the naïvety and ignorance of the audience) as valid evidence or even original discoveries. No doubt there are exceptions, and every period has had its genuine travellers: I could quote one or two among those who enjoy public favour at the present time. But my aim is neither to condemn hoaxes nor to award diplomas of genuineness, but rather to understand a moral and social phenomenon which is especially peculiar to France and, even here, has made its appearance only very recently.

Twenty years or so ago, people travelled very little and it was not halls like the Salle Pleyel, filled to capacity five or six days running, which extended a welcome to tellers of tales. The only place in Paris which catered for this kind of thing was a small, gloomy, icy and dilapidated amphitheatre in an ancient building at the far end of the Jardin des Plantes. There, the Société des Amis du Muséum held – and perhaps still holds – weekly lectures on the natural sciences.

The projector, which was fitted with inadequate bulbs, threw faint images on to an over-large screen, and the lecturer, however closely he peered, could hardly discern their outlines, while for the public they were scarcely distinguishable from the damp stains on the walls. A quarter of an hour after the advertised starting-time, the lecturer would still be desperately wondering if there would be any audience, apart from the handful of regular attenders scattered here and there among the tiered rows. Just when he was about to abandon hope, the lecture-room would fill up to half-capacity with

children accompanied by their mothers or nursemaids, some eager for a free change of scene, others weary of the dust and noise outside. To this mixture of moth-eaten ghosts and restless infants the lecturer was privileged – as the supreme reward for so much effort, care and hard work – to reveal his precious store of memories, which were permanently affected by the chill of the occasion, and which, as he spoke in the semi-darkness, he felt slipping away from him and falling one by one like pebbles to the bottom of a well.

Such, then, was the anthropologist's return – only a shade more dismal than the ceremony which had marked his departure; this was a banquet given by the Comité France-Amérique in a mansion on what is now the Avenue Franklin Roosevelt; the building was uninhabited, and a professional caterer, hired for the occasion, would arrive two hours before and set up camp with his stoves, plates and dishes, and yet a desolate odour still hung about the place, in spite of a hurried attempt at ventilation.

We all met there for the first time, we who were as unaccustomed to the solemnity of such a setting as to the dusty boredom it exhaled. We sat round a table which was far too small for the vast room, where there had been no time to do more than sweep the middle part which we were occupying. We were all young teachers who had only recently started work in provincial lycées and, thanks to a somewhat perverse whim on the part of Georges Dumas, we were about to be translated from our damp and remote winter quarters, redolent of rum toddy, musty cellars and stale wood embers, to tropical seas and luxury liners – all of which experiences, moreover, were doomed to have only a very remote resemblance to the inevitably false picture we were already conjuring up, as travellers are always fated to do.

I had been a pupil of Georges Dumas at the time when he was writing his *Traité de psychologie*. Once a week – I cannot remember whether it was on Thursday or Sunday mornings – a group of philosophy students met at the Sainte Anne Hospital, in a room with one wall, the one opposite the windows, completely covered with gay paintings by lunatics. In that room, one already had the sensation of being exposed to a peculiar kind of exotic experience; there was a platform on which Dumas ensconced his sturdy, angular frame, crowned by a knobbly head resembling a large root that has been bleached and stripped through a long stay on the sea bed. His waxy complexion created a unity between his face, his short, white bristling hair and his goatee beard, which was also white and sprouted in all directions. This curious piece of vegetable flotsam, still bushy with little roots, was

suddenly humanized by the flashing of coal-black eyes, which emphasized the whiteness of the head. The opposition was continued by the contrast between the white starched shirt with a turned-down collar and the broad-brimmed hat, the loosely tied bow and the suit, all of which were invariably black. There was not much to be learned from his lectures; he never prepared them, since he was aware of the physical charm exercised over his audience by the expressive movements of his lips, which were twisted in a constantly flickering grin, and above all by his voice, which was at once hoarse and melodious. It was a real siren's voice, with strange inflections recalling not only his native Languedoc but, even more than any regional peculiarities, certain very archaic musical modes of spoken French, so that the voice and the face conjured up, in two different sense registers, the same single, rustic and incisive style – the style characteristic of those sixteenth-century humanists, who were simultaneously doctors and philosophers, and of whom he seemed to be, both physically and mentally, a descendant.

The second hour, and occasionally the third too, were devoted to the presentation of various patients; this was the occasion for some extraordinary performances involving the crafty practitioner and certain inmates who, after years of confinement, were well used to this kind of drill, knew what was expected of them, and could produce symptoms when required or would put up just enough resistance to give their tamer the opportunity for a dazzling display of skill. The onlookers were not taken in, but willingly surrendered to the pleasure of watching these demonstrations of virtuosity. When a student attracted the attention of the master, he was rewarded by having a patient entrusted to him for a private interview. No contact with savage Indian tribes has ever daunted me more than the morning I spent with an old lady swathed in woollies, who compared herself to a rotten herring encased in a block of ice: she appeared intact, she said, but was threatened with disintegration, if her protective envelope should happen to melt.

At once a scientist and something of a practical joker, as well as the instigator of broad works of synthesis which remained subordinated to a rather disappointing critical positivism, Georges Dumas was a man of great nobility; he gave me proof of this later, just after the armistice and shortly before his death, when he was living in retirement in his native village of Lédignan. Although almost blind, he made a point of writing me a kind and

discreet letter, which could have had no other object than to affirm his solidarity with the first victims of the political events of the time.

I have always regretted not having known him in his youth when, dark and sun-tanned like a conquistador and full of enthusiasm for the scientific possibilities opened up by the psychological theories of the nineteenth century, he had embarked on the spiritual conquest of the New World. His relationship with Brazilian society was to be a case of love at first sight; by virtue of this mysterious phenomenon, two fragments of the Europe of four hundred years ago – certain essential elements of which had been preserved, on the one hand, in a Protestant family of southern France and, on the other, in an extremely refined and rather decadent bourgeois society leading a slow existence in a tropical environment – came together, recognized their affinity and were almost fused one with the other. Georges Dumas's mistake was that he never realized the profoundly archaic nature of this coincidence. The only part of Brazil which succumbed to his charm (and a brief period of power was to give this part the illusion of being the true Brazil) consisted of landowners who were gradually transferring their capital to partly foreign-owned industrial investments and who were trying to provide themselves with an ideological cover in the form of an urbane parliamentarianism; it was precisely these landowners who were bitterly referred to as the *gran fino* (the upper crust) by our students, who were themselves either of recent immigrant origin or the children of minor resident landowners who had been ruined by the fluctuations in world trade. Strangely enough, the founding of São Paulo university, Georges Dumas's greatest achievement, was to allow these students of humbler origin to begin their social ascension by obtaining qualifications which opened the way to administrative posts. Consequently, our university mission helped to form a new elite which was to turn away from us to some extent because Dumas and, following him, the Quai d'Orsay refused to understand that this elite was our most valuable creation, even though it was trying to overthrow the feudal landlords, who had certainly made it possible for us to come to Brazil, but had done so partly so that we could give them a cultural front and partly so that we could provide them with entertainment.

But on the evening of the Franco-American dinner, neither my colleagues nor myself – nor our wives who accompanied us – had any inkling of the involuntary role we were to play in the evolution of Brazilian society. We were too busy watching each other, and trying to avoid possible social

blunders, for we had just been warned by Georges Dumas that we would have to prepare ourselves to lead the same kind of life as our new masters, that is, become *habitués* of the Automobile Club, casinos and racecourses. This seemed extraordinary to young teachers who had previously been used to earning 26,000 francs a year, and it still seemed so even when we were given thrice that salary because so few people wanted to go abroad.

'The main thing', Dumas had told us, 'is to be well dressed.' And, to reassure us, he added with rather touching innocence that we could rig ourselves out very economically at a shop called 'A la Croix de Jeannette', not far from Les Halles, where he had always had very satisfactory service when he was a young medical student in Paris.

4. *The Quest for Power*

One trifling incident, which has remained in my memory like an omen, was, for me, the first instance of one of those dubious scents or veering winds which herald some profound disturbance. After deciding not to renew my contract with the University of São Paulo so as to be able to make a long trip into the interior, I had gone on ahead of my colleagues and was travelling back to Brazil a few weeks before they did; so, for the first time for four years, I was the only academic on board; for the first time, too, there were a great many passengers: some foreign businessmen, but chiefly a whole French military mission on its way to Paraguay. The familiar crossing was thus made unrecognizable, as was the once serene atmosphere on board ship. The officers and their wives made no distinction between a transatlantic crossing and a colonial expedition, or between their duties as instructors to what was, after all, a very modest army and the occupation of a conquered country. To prepare themselves, mentally at least, for their task, they turned the deck into a parade-ground, and the civilian passengers were reduced to the status of natives. We did not know where to turn to escape such noisy and highhanded behaviour, which even caused uneasiness among the ship's officers. However, the leader of the mission had a very different attitude from that of his subordinates; he and his wife were both discreet and considerate persons; and they came up to me one day in the secluded corner where I was escaping from the din, and asked about my past work and the object of my mission. Also, they managed indirectly to convey the fact that they were no more than powerless and clearsighted onlookers. The contrast was so glaring that it seemed to hide some mystery or other; three or four years later I remembered the incident, when I came across the officer's name in the newspapers and understood that his personal position was, indeed, paradoxical.

It was perhaps then, for the first time, that I understood something which was later confirmed by equally demoralizing experiences in other parts of the world. Journeys, those magic caskets full of dreamlike promises, will never again yield up their treasures untarnished. A proliferating and

overexcited civilization has broken the silence of the seas once and for all. The perfumes of the tropics and the pristine freshness of human beings have been corrupted by a busyness with dubious implications, which mortifies our desires and dooms us to acquire only contaminated memories.

Now that the Polynesian islands have been smothered in concrete and turned into aircraft carriers solidly anchored in the southern seas, when the whole of Asia is beginning to look like a dingy suburb, when shanty-towns are spreading across Africa, when civil and military aircraft blight the primeval innocence of the American or Melanesian forests even before destroying their virginity, what else can the socalled escapism of travelling do than confront us with the more unfortunate aspects of our history? Our great Western civilization, which has created the marvels we now enjoy, has only succeeded in producing them at the cost of corresponding ills. The order and harmony of the Western world, its most famous achievement, and a laboratory in which structures of a complexity as yet unknown are being fashioned, demand the elimination of a prodigious mass of noxious by-products which now contaminate the globe. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind.

So I can understand the mad passion for travel books and their deceptiveness. They create the illusion of something which no longer exists but still should exist, if we were to have any hope of avoiding the overwhelming conclusion that the history of the past twenty thousand years is irrevocable. There is nothing to be done about it now; civilization has ceased to be that delicate flower which was preserved and painstakingly cultivated in one or two sheltered areas of a soil rich in wild species which may have seemed menacing because of the vigour of their growth, but which nevertheless made it possible to vary and revitalize the cultivated stock. Mankind has opted for monoculture; it is in the process of creating a mass civilization, as beetroot is grown in the mass. Henceforth, man’s daily bill of fare will consist only of this one item.

In the old days, people used to risk their lives in India or in the Americas in order to bring back products which now seem to us to have been of comically little worth, such as *brasil* or brazilwood (from which the name Brazil was derived) – a red dye – and also pepper which had such a vogue in the time of Henry IV of France that courtiers used to carry the seeds in sweetmeat boxes and eat them like sweets. The visual or olfactory surprises they provided, since they were cheerfully warm to the eye or exquisitely hot

on the tongue, added a new range of sense experience to a civilization which had never suspected its own insipidity. We might say, then, that, through a twofold reversal, from these same lands our modern Marco Polos now bring back the moral spices of which our society feels an increasing need as it is conscious of sinking further into boredom, but that this time they take the form of photographs, books and travellers' tales.

Another parallel seems to me to be even more significant. Intentionally or unintentionally, these modern seasonings are falsified. Not, of course, because they are of a purely psychological nature, but because, however honest the narrator may be, he cannot – since this is no longer possible – supply them in a genuine form. For us to be willing to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted; through a degree of manipulation which, in the most sincere writers, takes place below the level of consciousness, actual experience is replaced by stereotypes. When I open one of these travel books, I see, for instance, that such and such a tribe is described as savage and is said still to preserve certain primitive customs, which are described in garbled form in a few superficial chapters; yet I spent weeks as a student reading the books on that tribe written by professional anthropologists either recently or as much as fifty years ago, before contact with the white races and the resulting epidemics reduced it to a handful of pathetic rootless individuals. Another community, whose existence is said to have been discovered by a youthful traveller who completed his study in forty-eight hours, was in fact seen (and this is an important point) outside its habitual territory in a temporary camp, which the writer naively assumed to be a permanent village. Moreover, the means of approach to the tribe are carefully glossed over, so as not to reveal the presence of the mission station which has been consistently in touch with the natives for the past twenty years, or of the local motor-boat service reaching into the heart of the territory. But the existence of the latter can be deduced by a practised eye from small details in the illustrations, since the photographer has not always been able to avoid including the rusty petrolcans in which this virgin people does its cooking.

The emptiness of such claims, the naïve credulity with which they are received and which in fact helps to prompt them, and even the element of praiseworthiness which to some extent redeems so much wasted effort (doubly wasted because its only effect is to extend the degeneration that it tries to conceal) – all this implies powerful psychological motives, both in

the authors and their public, on which the study of certain native institutions can serve to throw light. Anthropology itself can help to elucidate the vogue which wins it so much harmful collaboration.

Among a great many North American tribes, the social prestige of the individual is determined by the circumstances surrounding the ordeals connected with puberty. Some young men set themselves adrift on solitary rafts without food; others seek solitude in the mountains where they have to face wild beasts, as well as cold and rain. For days, weeks or months on end, as the case may be, they do not eat properly, but live only on coarse food, or fast for long periods and aggravate their impaired physical condition by the use of emetics. Everything is turned into a means of communication with the beyond. They stay immersed for long periods in icy water, deliberately mutilate one or more of their finger-joints, or lacerate their fasciae by dragging heavy loads attached by ropes to sharpened pegs inserted under their dorsal muscles. When they do not resort to such extremes, they at least exhaust themselves by performing various pointless tasks, such as removing all their body hairs, one at a time, or stripping pine branches until not a single needle remains, or hollowing out blocks of stone.

In the dazed, debilitated and delirious state induced by these ordeals they hope to enter into communication with the supernatural world. They believe that a magic animal, touched by the intensity of their sufferings and their prayers, will be forced to appear to them; that a vision will reveal which one will henceforth be their guardian spirit, so that they can take its name and derive special powers from it, which will determine their privileges and rank within their social group.

Have we to conclude that, in the opinion of these natives, nothing is to be expected from society? Both institutions and customs seem to them like a mechanism the monotonous functioning of which leaves nothing to chance, luck or ability. They may think that the only means of compelling fate is to venture into those hazardous marginal areas where social norms cease to have any meaning, and where the protective laws and demands of the group no longer prevail; to go right to the frontiers of average, ordered living, to the breaking point of bodily strength and to the extremes of physical and moral suffering. In this unstable border area, there is a danger of slipping beyond the pale and never coming back, as well as a possibility of drawing from the vast ocean of unexploited forces surrounding organized society a

personal supply of power, thanks to which he who has risked all can hope to modify an otherwise unchangeable social order.

However, this interpretation is probably still too superficial, since among these Indians of the North American plains and plateau, individual beliefs are not at variance with collective doctrine. The dialectic as a whole springs from the customs and philosophy of the group. It is from the group that individuals learn their creed; belief in guardian spirits is a group phenomenon, and it is society as a whole which teaches its members that their only hope, within the framework of the social order, is to make an absurd and desperate attempt to break away from it.

It is obvious that this ‘quest for power’ enjoys a renewed vogue in contemporary French society, in the unsophisticated form of the relationship between the public and ‘its’ explorers. Our adolescents too, from puberty onwards, are free to obey the stimuli which have been acting upon them from all sides since early childhood, and to escape, in some way or other, from the temporary hold their civilization has on them. The escape may take place upwards, through the climbing of a mountain, or downwards, by descending into the bowels of the earth, or horizontally, through travel to remote countries. Or again, the desired extreme may be a mental or moral one, as is the case with those individuals who deliberately put themselves into such difficult situations that, in our present state of knowledge, they leave themselves no possibility of survival.

Society shows complete indifference to what might be called the rational outcome of such adventures. They neither involve new scientific discoveries, nor make any new contribution to poetry and literature, since the accounts are, for the most part, appallingly feeble. What counts is the attempt in itself, not any possible aim. As in the native example just given, a young man who lives outside his social group for a few weeks or months, so as to expose himself (sometimes with conviction and sincerity, sometimes, on the contrary, with caution and craftiness – but such differences are not unknown in native societies) to an extreme situation, comes back endowed with a power which finds expression in the writing of newspaper articles and bestsellers and in lecturing to packed halls. However, its magic character is evidenced by the process of self-delusion operating in the society and which explains the phenomenon in all cases. The fact is that these primitive peoples, the briefest contact with whom can sanctify the traveller, these icy summits, deep caverns and impenetrable

forests – all of them august settings for noble and profitable revelations – are all, in their different ways, enemies of our society, which pretends to itself that it is investing them with nobility at the very time when it is completing their destruction, whereas it viewed them with terror and disgust when they were genuine adversaries. The savages of the Amazonian forest are sensitive and powerless victims, pathetic creatures caught in the toils of mechanized civilization, and I can resign myself to understanding the fate which is destroying them; but I refuse to be the dupe of a kind of magic which is still more feeble than their own, and which brandishes before an eager public albums of coloured photographs, instead of the now vanished native masks. Perhaps the public imagines that the charms of the savages can be appropriated through the medium of these photographs. Not content with having eliminated savage life, and unaware even of having done so, it feels the need feverishly to appease the nostalgic cannibalism of history with the shadows of those that history has already destroyed.

Can it be that I, the elderly predecessor of those scourers of the jungle, am the only one to have brought back nothing but a handful of ashes? Is mine the only voice to bear witness to the impossibility of escapism? Like the Indian in the myth, I went as far as the earth allows one to go, and when I arrived at the world's end, I questioned the people, the creatures and things I found there and met with the same disappointment: 'He stood still, weeping bitterly, praying and moaning. And yet no mysterious sound reached his ears, nor was he put to sleep in order to be transported, as he slept, to the temple of the magic animals. For him there could no longer be the slightest doubt: no power, from anyone, had been granted him …'

Dreams, 'the god of the savages', as the old missionaries used to say, have always slipped through my fingers like quicksilver. But a few shining particles may have remained stuck, here and there. At Cuiaba, perhaps, where the gold nuggets used to come from? At Ubatuba, now a deserted port, but where the galleons used to be loaded two hundred years ago? In the air over the Arabian deserts, which were pink and green with the pearly lustre of ear-shells? In America or in Asia? On the Newfoundland sandbanks, the Bolivian plateaux or the hills along the Burmese frontier? I can pick out at random a name still steeped in the magic of legend: Lahore.

An airfield in a featureless suburb; endless avenues planted with trees and lined with villas; an hotel, standing in an enclosure and reminiscent of some Normandy stud farm, being just a row of several identical buildings,

the doors of which, all at ground level and juxtaposed like stable-doors, led into identical apartments, each with a sitting-room in the front, a dressing-room with washing facilities at the back, and a bedroom in the middle. Two miles of avenue led to a provincial-looking square, with more avenues branching off, and dotted with occasional shops – a chemist's, a photographer's, a bookseller's or a watchmaker's. Caught in this vast and meaningless expanse, I felt that what I was looking for was already beyond my reach. Where was the old, the real Lahore? In order to get to it, on the far side of these badly laid cut and already decrepit suburbs, I still had to go through two miles of bazaar, where, with the help of mechanical saws, cheap jewellery was being manufactured out of gold the thickness of tin-plate, and where there were stalls displaying cosmetics, medicines and imported plastic objects. I wondered if I was at last discovering the real Lahore in dark little streets, where I had to flatten myself against the wall to make way for flocks of sheep with blue-and-pink dyed fleece, and for buffaloes – each as big as three cows – which barged into one in friendly fashion, and, still more often, for lorries. Was it when I was gazing at crumbling woodwork, eaten away with age? I might have got some idea of its delicate fretting and carving had the approach to it not been made impossible by the ramshackle electrical supply system, which spread its festoons of wire from wall to wall, like a spider's web all through the old town. From time to time, for a second or two and over the space of a few yards, an image or an echo would seem to surge up from the past: for instance, the clear, serene tinkling in the little street where the gold and silver beaters worked, as if some genie with a thousand arms were absent-mindedly striking a xylophone. Immediately beyond, I again found myself in a vast network of avenues, which had been driven through the ruins of 500-year-old houses, damaged in recent riots – but they had in any case been so often destroyed and repaired that they were of an ageless and indescribable decrepitude. In exploring all this, I was being true to myself as an archaeologist of space, seeking in vain to recreate a lost local colour with the help of fragments and debris.

Then, insidiously, illusion began to lay its snares. I wished I had lived in the days of *real* journeys, when it was still possible to see the full splendour of a spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted and spoilt; I wished I had not trodden that ground as myself, but as Bernier, Tavernier or Manucci did … Once embarked upon, this guessing game can continue indefinitely.

When was the best time to see India? At what period would the study of the Brazilian savages have afforded the purest satisfaction, and revealed them in their least adulterated state? Would it have been better to arrive in Rio in the eighteenth century with Bougainville, or in the sixteenth with Léry and Thevet? For every five years I move back in time, I am able to save a custom, gain a ceremony or share in another belief. But I know the texts too well not to realize that, by going back a century, I am at the same time forgoing data and lines of inquiry which would offer intellectual enrichment. And so I am caught within a circle from which there is no escape: the less human societies were able to communicate with each other and therefore to corrupt each other through contact, the less their respective emissaries were able to perceive the wealth and significance of their diversity. In short, I have only two possibilities: either I can be like some traveller of the olden days, who was faced with a stupendous spectacle, all, or almost all, of which eluded him, or worse still, filled him with scorn and disgust; or I can be a modern traveller, chasing after the vestiges of a vanished reality. I lose on both counts, and more seriously than may at first appear, for, while I complain of being able to glimpse no more than the shadow of the past, I may be insensitive to reality as it is taking shape at this very moment, since I have not reached the stage of development at which I would be capable of perceiving it. A few hundred years hence, in this same place, another traveller, as despairing as myself, will mourn the disappearance of what I might have seen, but failed to see. I am subject to a double infirmity: all that I perceive offends me, and I constantly reproach myself for not seeing as much as I should.

For a long time I was paralysed by this dilemma, but I have the eling that efth cloudy liquid is now beginning to settle. Evanescent forms are becoming clearer, and confusion is being slowly dispelled. What has happened is that time has passed. Forgetfulness, by rolling my memories along in its tide, has done more than merely wear them down or consign them to oblivion. The profound structure it has created out of the fragments allows me to achieve a more stable equilibrium, and to see a clearer pattern. One order has been replaced by another. Between these two cliffs, which preserve the distance between my gaze and its object, time, the destroyer, has begun to pile up rubble. Sharp edges have been blunted and whole sections have collapsed: periods and places collide, are juxtaposed or are inverted, like strata displaced by the tremors on the crust of an ageing

planet. Some insignificant detail belonging to the distant past may now stand out like a peak, while whole layers of my past have disappeared without trace. Events without any apparent connection, and originating from incongruous periods and places, slide one over the other and suddenly crystallize into a sort of edifice which seems to have been conceived by an architect wiser than my personal history. ‘Every man’, wrote Chateaubriand, ‘carries within him a world which is composed of all that he has seen and loved, and to which he constantly returns, even when he is travelling through, and seems to be living in, some different world.’* Henceforth, it will be possible to bridge the gap between the two worlds. Time, in an unexpected way, has extended its isthmus between life and myself; twenty years of forgetfulness were required before I could establish communion with my earlier experience, which I had sought the world over without understanding its significance or appreciating its essence.

* *Voyages en Italie*, entry dated December 11th.

38. *A Little Glass of Rum*[*]

The only justification for the dramatic fable described in the preceding chapter is that it illustrates the mental disorder to which the traveller is exposed through abnormal living conditions over a prolonged period. But the problem still remains: how can the anthropologist overcome the contradiction resulting from the circumstances of his choice? He has in front of him and available for study a given society – his own; why does he decide to spurn it and to reserve for other societies – which are among the most remote and the most alien – a patience and a devotion which his choice of vocation has deflected from his fellow-citizens? It is no accident that the anthropologist should rarely have a neutral attitude towards his own group. If he is a missionary or an administrator, we can infer from this that he has agreed to identify himself with a certain system, to the point of dedicating his life to its propagation; and when he practises his profession on a scientific or academic level, one can very probably discover in his past certain objective factors which show him to be ill-adapted to the society into which he was born. In assuming his role, he has tried to find either a practical means of reconciling his allegiance to a group and the reservations he feels with regard to it, or, quite simply, a way of turning to advantage an initial state of detachment which gives him an advantage in approaching different societies, since he is already halfway towards them.

But if he is honest, he is faced with a problem: the value he attaches to foreign societies – and which appears to be higher in proportion as the society is more foreign – has no independent foundation; it is a function of his disdain for, and occasionally hostility towards, the customs prevailing in his native setting. While often inclined to subversion among his own people and in revolt against traditional behaviour, the anthropologist appears respectful to the point of conservatism as soon as he is dealing with a society different from his own. This is more than just a bias. In fact, it is something quite different: I know some anthropologists who are conformists. But they are so in a derivative way, by virtue of a kind of secondary assimilation of their society to the foreign ones they study. Their

allegiance is always given to the latter, and the reason why they have abandoned their initial revolt against their own, is that they make the additional concession to foreign societies of approaching their own as they would like all societies to be approached. There is no way out of the dilemma: either the anthropologist adheres to the norms of his own group and other groups inspire in him no more than a fleeting curiosity which is never quite devoid of disapproval, or he is capable of giving himself wholeheartedly to these other groups and his objectivity is vitiated by the fact that, intentionally or not, he has had to withhold himself from at least one society, in order to devote himself to all. He therefore commits the very sin that he lays at the door of those who contest the exceptional significance of his vocation.

I was assailed by this doubt for the first time during the enforced stay in the West Indies that I described at the beginning of this book. In Martinique, I had visited rustic and neglected rum-distilleries where the equipment and the methods used had not changed since the eighteenth century. In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, in the factories of the company which enjoys a virtual monopoly over the whole of the sugar production, I was faced by a display of white enamel tanks and chromium piping. Yet the various kinds of Martinique rum, as I tasted them in front of ancient wooden vats thickly encrusted with waste matter, were mellow and scented, whereas those of Puerto Rico are coarse and harsh. We may suppose, then, that the subtlety of the Martinique rums is dependent on impurities the continuance of which is encouraged by the archaic method of production. To me, this contrast illustrates the paradox of civilization: its charms are due essentially to the various residues it carries along with it, although this does not absolve us of the obligation to purify the stream. By being doubly in the right, we are admitting our mistake. We are right to be rational and to try to increase our production and so keep manufacturing costs down. But we are also right to cherish those very imperfections we are endeavouring to eliminate. Social life consists in destroying that which gives it its savour. The contradiction seems to disappear when we move from the consideration of our own society to the study of foreign ones. We ourselves are caught up in the evolution of our own society and are, in a sense, interested parties. We are not in a position not to will those things which our situation forces us to carry into effect; when we are dealing with foreign societies, everything is different: the objectivity which was impossible in the first

instance is freely granted to us. Since we are no longer agents but spectators of the transformations which are taking place, we are all the better able to compare and evaluate their future and their past, since these remain subjects for aesthetic contemplation and intellectual reflection, instead of being brought home to us in the form of mental anxiety.

By arguing as I have just done, I may have thrown light on the contradiction; I have shown where it originates and how we manage to come to terms with it. But I have certainly not solved it. Is the contradiction, then, a permanent one? It has sometimes been said to be so, and the argument used as a condemnation of anthropologists. Since our vocation displays the predilection we feel for social and cultural structures very different from our own – overestimating the former at the expense of the latter – we are said to be guilty of a fundamental inconsistency; how could we proclaim the validity of the foreign societies, except by basing our judgment on the values of the society which has prompted us to engage in research? Since we are permanently unable to escape from the norms by which we have been conditioned, our attempts to put different societies, including our own, into perspective, are said to be no more than a shamefaced way of admitting its superiority over all the others.

Behind the reasoning of these specious critics, there is nothing but a bad pun: they try to pass off the mystification (in which they themselves indulge) as the reverse of mysticism (of which they wrongly accuse us). Archaeological or anthropological research shows that certain civilizations, whether contemporary or extinct, know, or used to know, how to solve certain problems better than we do, although we have endeavoured to obtain the same results. To quote only one example: only during recent years have we discovered the material and physiological principles underlying Eskimo dress and the form of Eskimo houses, and how these principles, of which we were unaware, allow them to live in harsh climatic conditions, to which they are adapted neither by use nor by anything exceptional in their constitutions. So true is this that it also enables us to understand why the so-called improvement that explorers introduced into Eskimo dress proved to be less than useless, and in fact produced the opposite result to what was intended. The native solution was perfect; we could only realize this once we had grasped the theory on which it was based.

This is not where the difficulty lies. If we judge the achievements of other social groups in relation to the kind of objectives we set ourselves, we have at times to acknowledge their superiority; but in so doing we acquire the right to judge them, and hence to condemn all their other objectives which do not coincide with those we approve of. We implicitly acknowledge that our society with its customs and norms enjoys a privileged position, since an observer belonging to another social group would pass different verdicts on the same examples. This being so, how can the study of anthropology claim to be scientific? To reestablish an objective approach, we must abstain from making judgments of this kind. We must accept the fact that each society has made a certain choice, within the range of existing human possibilities, and that the various choices cannot be compared with each other: they are all equally valid. But in this case a new problem arises; while in the first instance we were in danger of falling into obscurantism, in the form of a blind refusal of everything foreign to us, we now run the risk of accepting a kind of eclecticism which would prevent us denouncing any feature of a given culture – not even cruelty, injustice and poverty, against which the very society suffering these ills may be protesting. And since these abuses also exist in our society, what right have we to combat them at home, if we accept them as inevitable when they occur elsewhere?

Behind the two divergent attitudes of the anthropologist who is a critic at home and a conformist abroad, there lies, then, another contradiction from which he finds it even more difficult to escape. If he wishes to contribute to the improvement of his own community, he must condemn social conditions similar to those he is fighting against, wherever they exist, in which case he relinquishes his objectivity and impartiality. Conversely, the detachment to which he is constrained by moral scrupulousness and scientific accuracy prevents him criticizing his own society, since he is refraining from judging any one society in order to acquire knowledge of them all. Action within one’s own society precludes understanding of other societies, but a thirst for universal understanding involves renouncing all possibility of reform.

If the contradiction were insurmountable, the anthropologist ought to have no hesitation about the alternative to opt for: he is an anthropologist, and chose to become one; he must therefore accept the mutilation inseparable from his vocation. He has preferred other societies and must

suffer the consequences of his preference: his function will be simply to understand these other societies, in whose name he is unable to act, since the very fact that they are different prevents him thinking and taking decisions for them; such behaviour would be tantamount to identifying himself with them. Furthermore, he will renounce all action within his own society, because he is afraid of taking a stand about values which could well recur in different societies, and therefore of allowing his thought to be coloured by prejudice. Only the initial choice will remain, and for that he will admit no justification: it is a pure, unmotivated act, or if motivated at all, can be so only by external considerations connected with the character or life-history of the particular individual.

Fortunately, the situation is not quite as bad as that; after peering into the abyss which yawns in front of us, we may be allowed to look for a way of avoiding it. Such a way can be found, provided we are moderate in our judgments and break the difficulty down into two stages.

No society is perfect. It is in the nature of all societies to include a degree of impurity incompatible with the norms they proclaim and which finds concrete expression in a certain dosage of injustice, insensitiveness and cruelty. If it is asked how this dosage is to be evaluated, anthropological research can supply an answer. While it is true that comparison between a small number of societies makes them appear very different from each other, the differences diminish as the field of investigation widens. We then discover that no society is fundamentally good, but that none is absolutely bad; they all offer their members certain advantages, with the proviso that there is invariably a residue of evil, the amount of which seems to remain more or less constant and perhaps corresponds to a specific inertia in social life resistant to all attempts at organization.

This assertion will surprise readers of travellers' tales who recall with dismay the 'barbarous' customs of some native community or other. Yet such superficial reactions cannot stand up to an accurate appreciation of the facts, once the latter have been set in a wider perspective. Let us take the case of cannibalism, which of all savage practices is no doubt the one that inspires the greatest horror and disgust. First, we must separate off its purely alimentary forms, that is those instances in which the appetite for human flesh is to be explained by the lack of any other animal food, as was the case in certain Polynesian islands. No society is morally protected from

such hunger pangs: famine can force men to eat anything, as is proved by the recent example of the extermination camps.

There remain those forms of cannibalism which can be termed positive, since they stem from a mystic, magic or religious cause: for instance, the consumption of a fragment of the body of a parent or of an enemy in order to ensure the incorporation of virtues or the neutralization of power; such rites are usually carried out very discreetly and involve only a small quantity of organic matter which is ground down or mixed with other foods, but even when they are practised in more overt forms it has to be admitted that the moral condemnation of such customs implies either a belief in bodily resurrection (resurrection being jeopardized by the material destruction of the corpse), or the affirmation of a link between the soul and the body, with a corresponding dualism; that is, in either case, convictions similar in nature to those underlying the practice of ritual consumption and which we have no reason to prefer to them. This is all the truer when we consider that the disrespect for the memory of the deceased which cannibals might be accused of is certainly no greater – far from it – than that tolerated by us on the dissecting table.

But above all, we should realize that certain of our own customs might appear, to an observer belonging to a different society, to be similar in nature to cannibalism, although cannibalism strikes us as being foreign to the idea of civilization. I am thinking, for instance, of our legal and prison systems. If we studied societies from the outside, it would be tempting to distinguish two contrasting types: those which practise cannibalism – that is, which regard the absorption of certain individuals possessing dangerous powers as the only means of neutralizing those powers and even of turning them to advantage – and those which, like our own society, adopt what might be called the practice of *anthropemy* (from the Greek *émein*, to vomit); faced with the same problem, the latter type of society has chosen the opposite solution, which consists in ejecting dangerous individuals from the social body and keeping them temporarily or permanently in isolation, away from all contact with their fellows, in establishments specially intended for this purpose. Most of the societies which we call primitive would regard this custom with profound horror; it would make us, in their eyes, guilty of that same barbarity of which we are inclined to accuse them because of their symmetrically opposite behaviour.

Societies which seem savage to us in some respects may appear humane and kindly when considered from another angle. Let us take the case of the Plains Indians of North America, who are doubly significant in this connection, because they practised certain moderate forms of cannibalism and at the same time offer one of the rare instances of a primitive community with an organized police system. It would never have occurred to their police (who were also a judicial body) to make the culprit's punishment take the form of a breaking of social ties. If a native had infringed the laws of the tribe, he was punished by having all his possessions destroyed, including his tent and horses. But at the same time, the police contracted a debt towards him: it was their duty to organize collective reparation for the losses sustained by the culprit as his punishment. This put him under an obligation to the group, and he had to show his gratitude to them by means of presents that the whole community – including the police – helped him to assemble, so that this once again reversed the relationships; and so on and so forth until, after a whole series of gifts and counter-gifts, the disorder introduced by the crime was gradually neutralized and there was a return to the pristine state of order. Not only are such customs more humane than ours, they are also more coherent, even if the problem is formulated in terms of modern European psychology; logically, the 'infantilization' of the culprit implied by the notion of punishment demands that he should have a corresponding right to a reward, in the absence of which the initial procedure will prove ineffective and may even lead to results contrary to those that were hoped for. Our system is the height of absurdity, since we treat the culprit both as a child, so as to have the right to punish him, and as an adult, in order to deny him consolation; and we believe we have made great spiritual progress because, instead of eating a few of our fellow-men, we subject them to physical and moral mutilation.

Analysis of this kind, if carried out sincerely and methodically, leads to two results: it introduces an element of moderation and honesty into our evaluation of customs and ways of life very remote from our own, without conferring on them the virtue of absoluteness, which exists in no society. And it removes from our own customs that air of inherent rightness which they so easily have for anyone unacquainted with other customs, or whose knowledge is partial and biased. Consequently, it is true that anthropological analysis tips the balance in favour of foreign societies and

against the observer's own; in this sense, it is self-contradictory. But further reflection will show that the contradiction is more apparent than real.

It has sometimes been said that European society is the only one which has produced anthropologists, and that therein lies its greatness. Anthropologists may wish to deny it other forms of superiority, but they must respect this one, since without it they themselves would not exist. Actually, one could claim exactly the opposite: Western Europe may have produced anthropologists precisely because it was a prey to strong feelings of remorse, which forced it to compare its image with those of different societies in the hope that they would show the same defects or would help to explain how its own defects had developed within it. But even if it is true that comparison between our society and all the rest, whether past or present, undermines the basis of our society, other societies will suffer the same fate. The general averageness I referred to above brings out by contrast the existence of a number of ogres, and it so happens that we are among them; not by accident, since if we had not been of their number and had not deserved first prize in this sorry competition, anthropology would not have been invented by us, because we would not have felt the need for it. The anthropologist is the less able to ignore his own civilization and to dissociate himself from its faults in that his very existence is incomprehensible except as an attempt at redemption: he is the symbol of atonement. But other societies too have been tainted with the same original sin; not very many perhaps, and they become increasingly fewer in number as we move down the scale of progress. I need only cite the example of Aztec culture, that open wound in the side of American history, whose maniacal obsession with blood and torture (a universal obsession, in fact, but overt in the case of the Aztecs in the *excessive form* that comparison allows us to define) – however explicable it may be through the need to overcome the fear of death – puts it on a level with ourselves, not because the Aztecs were the only people wicked in this way but because, like us, they were inordinately so.

Yet this condemnation of ourselves by ourselves does not imply that we are prepared to award a certificate of excellence to any particular society, past or present, situated at any specific point in time or space. To do so would be to commit a real injustice, since we should be failing to recognize the fact that, were we part of that society, we would find it intolerable: we would condemn it on the same grounds as we condemn our own society.

Does this mean that we must inevitably criticize any form of social organization and glorify a state of nature which social organization can only corrupt? This was Diderot's view when he wrote: 'Beware of him who comes to impose order.' He thought that 'the abridged history' of humanity could be summarized as follows: 'There existed a natural man; an artificial man was introduced into this natural man, and inside the cave there arose continuous warfare which lasts throughout life.' This is an absurd conception. Man is inseparable from language and language implies society. Bougainville's Polynesians (Diderot put forward this theory in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*) were just as much social beings are we are. To maintain any other point of view would be to run counter to anthropological analysis instead of moving in the direction which it encourages us to explore.

The more I consider these problems, the more I am convinced that they admit of no reply other than the one given by Rousseau: Rousseau, who has been so maligned, who is more misunderstood now than ever before and is preposterously accused of having glorified the state of nature – an error that can be attributed to Diderot but not to him – when in fact he said exactly the opposite and is the only thinker who can show us how to escape from the contradictions in which we are still floundering in the wake of his opponents; Rousseau, the most anthropological of the *philosophes*: although he never travelled to distant lands, his documentation was as complete as it could be for a man of his time and, unlike Voltaire, he infused life into it by his warm-hearted curiosity about peasant customs and popular thought; Rousseau, our master and brother, to whom we have behaved with such ingratitude but to whom every page of this book could have been dedicated, had the homage been worthy of his great memory. We shall emerge from the contradiction inherent in the anthropologist's position only by repeating, on our own account, the procedure which allowed Rousseau to move on from the ruins left by the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, to the ample structure of the *Contrat Social*, the secret of which is revealed in *Emile*. It was he who taught us that, after demolishing all forms of social organization, we can still discover the principles which will allow us to construct a new form.

Rousseau never fell into Diderot's error of idealizing natural man. He is never in any danger of confusing the natural state with the social state; he knows that the latter is inherent in man, but that it leads to evils; the only

problem is to discover whether these evils are themselves inherent in the social state. This means looking beyond abuses and crimes to find the unshakable basis of human society.

To this quest, anthropological comparison can contribute in two ways. It shows that the basis is not to be discovered in our civilization: of all known societies ours is no doubt the one most remote from it. At the same time, by bringing out the characteristics common to the majority of human societies, it helps us to postulate a type, of which no society is a faithful realization, but which indicates the direction the investigation ought to follow. Rousseau thought that the way of life now known as neolithic offered the nearest approach to an experimental representation of the type. One may, or may not, agree with him. I am rather inclined to believe he was right. By neolithic times, man had already made most of the inventions necessary for his safety. We have already seen why writing can be excluded; to say that it is a double-edged weapon is not a sign of primitivism; this is a truth that has been rediscovered by contemporary cyberneticians. In the neolithic period, man knew how to protect himself against cold and hunger; he had achieved leisure in which to think; no doubt there was little he could do against disease, but it is not certain that advances in hygiene have had any other effect than to transfer the responsibility for maintaining demographic equilibrium from epidemics, which were no more dreadful a means than any other, to different phenomena such as widespread famine and wars of extermination.

In that mythic age, man was no freer than he is today; but only his humanness made him a slave. Since his control over nature remained very limited, he was protected – and to some extent released from bondage – by a cushioning of dreams. As these dreams were gradually transformed into knowledge, man’s power increased and became a great source of pride; but this power, which gears us, as it were, to the universe, is surely little more than our subjective awareness of a progressive welding together of humanity and the physical universe, whose great deterministic laws, instead of remaining remote and awe-inspiring, now use thought itself as an intermediary medium and are colonizing us on behalf of a silent world of which we have become the agents.

Rousseau was no doubt right to believe that it would have been better for our well-being had mankind kept to ‘a happy mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the irrepressible busyness of our self-esteem’, that

such a position was the ‘best for man’ and that he only emerged from it through ‘some unhappy chance’, this being, of course, the advent of mechanization, a doubly exceptional phenomenon, since it was both unique and of late occurrence. It nevertheless remains clear that this intermediary position is by no means a primitive state, since it presupposes and admits of a certain degree of progress; and that no known society offers an exceptionally accurate representation of it, even if ‘the example of the savages, who have almost all been found at this stage, would seem to confirm that the human race was intended always to remain in it.’

The study of these savages leads to something other than the revelation of a Utopian state of nature or the discovery of the perfect society in the depths of the forest; it helps us to build a theoretical model of human society, which does not correspond to any observable reality, but with the aid of which we may succeed in distinguishing between ‘what is primordial and what is artificial in man’s present nature and in obtaining a good knowledge of a state which no longer exists, which has perhaps never existed, and which will probably never exist in the future, but of which it is nevertheless essential to have a sound conception in order to pass valid judgment on our present state’. I have already quoted this remark to bring out the significance of my study of the Nambikwara. Rousseau’s thought, which was always in advance of his time, does not dissociate theoretical sociology from research in the laboratory or in the field, which he recognized as being necessary. Natural man did not precede society, nor is he outside it. Our task is to rediscover his form as it is immanent in the social state, mankind being inconceivable outside society; this means working out a programme of the experiments which ‘would be necessary in order to arrive at a knowledge of natural man’ and determining ‘the means whereby these experiments can be made within society’.

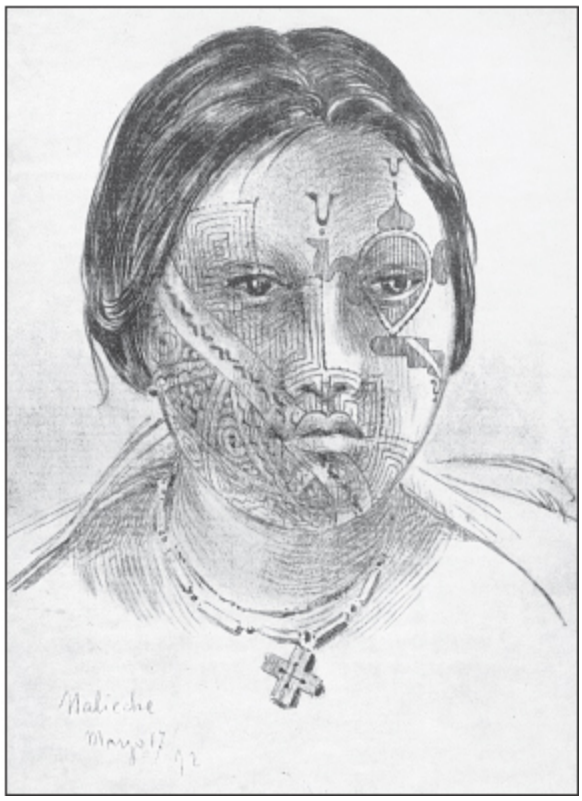
But the model – this is Rousseau’s solution – is eternal and universal. Other societies are perhaps no better than our own; even if we are inclined to believe they are, we have no method at our disposal for proving it. However, by getting to know them better, we are enabled to detach ourselves from our own society. Not that our own society is peculiarly or absolutely bad. But it is the only one from which we have a duty to free ourselves: we are, by definition, free in relation to the others. We thus put ourselves in a position to embark on the second stage, which consists in using all societies – without adopting features from any one of them – to

elucidate principles of social life that we can apply in reforming our own customs and not those of foreign societies: through the operation of a prerogative which is the reverse of the one just mentioned, the society we belong to is the only society we are in a position to transform without any risk of destroying it, since the changes, being introduced by us, are coming from within the society itself.

By taking as our inspiration a model outside time and place, we are certainly running a risk: we may be underestimating the reality of progress. It is as if we were asserting that men have always and everywhere undertaken the same task in striving towards the same objective and that, throughout history, only the means have differed. I confess that this view does not worry me; it seems to be the one most in keeping with the facts, as revealed by history and anthropology, and above all it appears to be more fruitful. Enthusiastic partisans of the idea of progress are in danger of failing to recognize – because they set so little store by them – the immense riches accumulated by the human race on either side of the narrow furrow on which they keep their eyes fixed; by underrating the achievements of the past, they devalue all those which still remain to be accomplished. If men have always been concerned with only one task – how to create a society fit to live in – the forces which inspired our distant ancestors are also present in us. Nothing is settled; everything can still be altered. What was done, but turned out wrong, can be done again. 'The Golden Age, which blind superstition had placed behind [or ahead of] us, is *in us*.' The brotherhood of man acquires a concrete meaning when it makes us see, in the poorest tribe, a confirmation of our own image and an experience, the lessons of which we can assimilate, along with so many others. We may even discover a pristine freshness in these lessons. Since we know that, for thousands of years, man has succeeded only in repeating himself, we will attain to that nobility of thought which consists in going back beyond all the repetitions and taking as the starting-point of our reflections the indefinable grandeur of man's beginnings. Being human signifies, for each one of us, belonging to a class, a society, a country, a continent and a civilization; and for us European earth-dwellers, the adventure played out in the heart of the New World signifies in the first place that it was not our world and that we bear responsibility for the crime of its destruction; and secondly, that there will never be another New World: since the confrontation between the Old World and the New makes us thus conscious of ourselves, let us at least

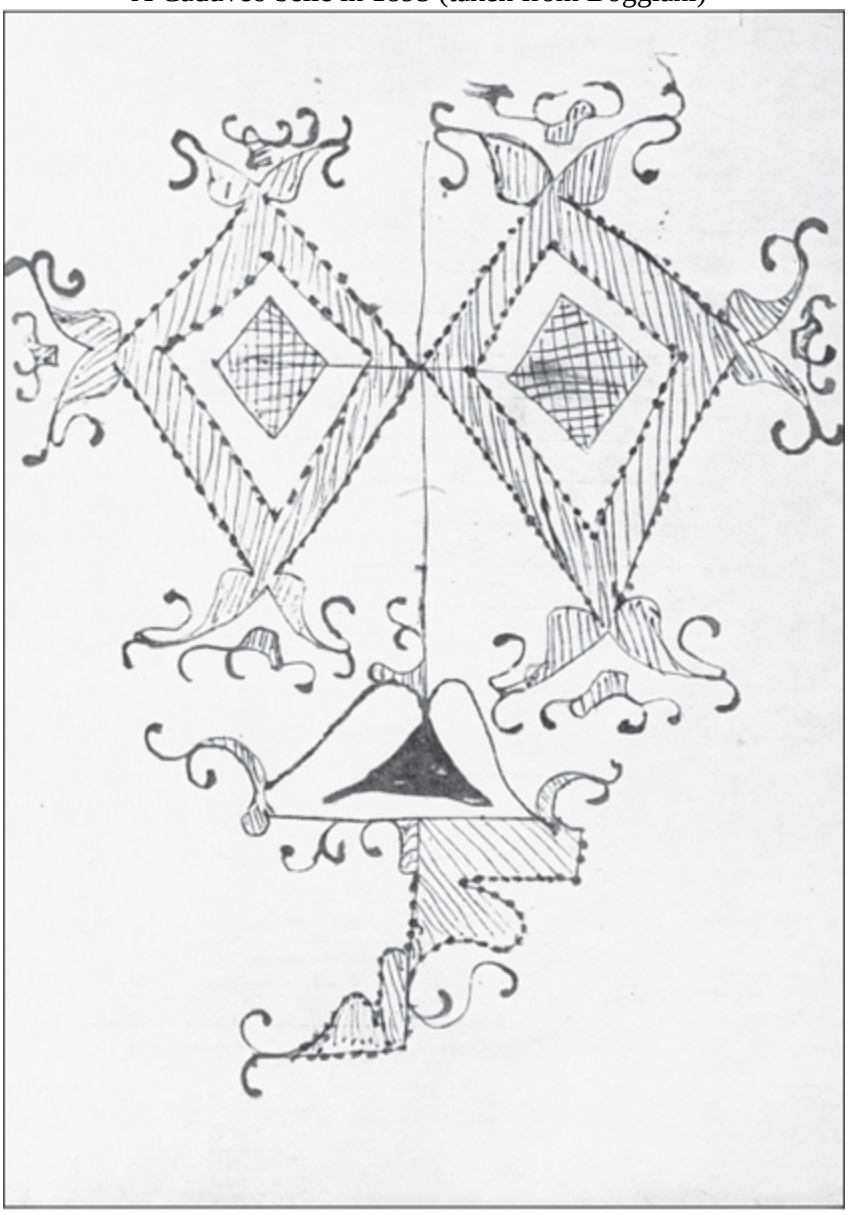
express it in its primary terms – in the place where, and by referring back to a time when, our world missed the opportunity offered to it of choosing between its various missions.

* TRANSLATORS' NOTE: Traditionally, French criminals about to be guillotined were offered a last cigarette and a little glass of rum. The author is referring to the significance of rum as discussed in the chapter and to the possible fate of both the anthropologist and mankind as a whole.

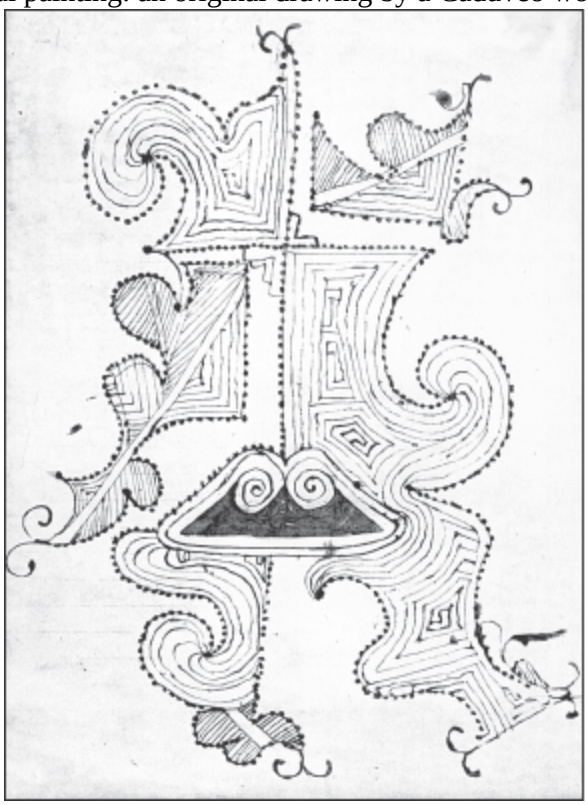


A Caduveo woman with a painted face

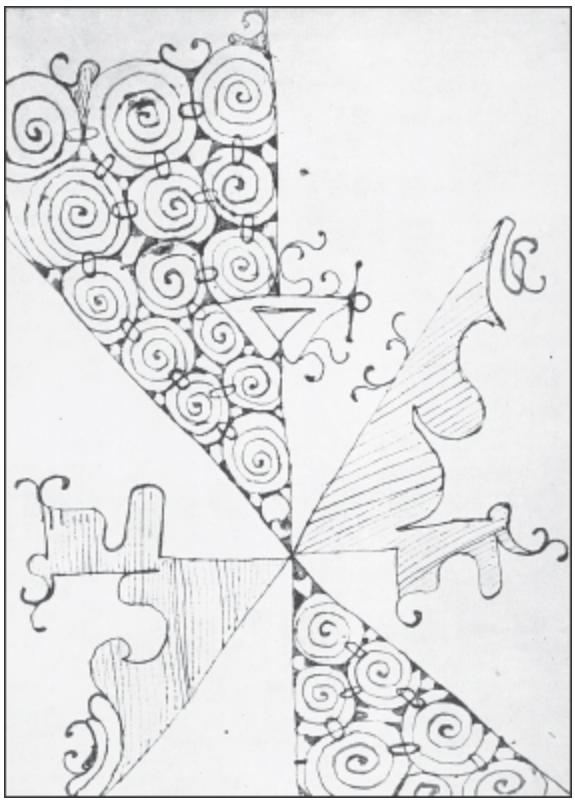
A Caduveo belle in 1895 (taken from Boggiani)



Facial painting: an original drawing by a Caduveo woman



Two further facial paintings drawn by natives



A Caduveo girl made ready for her puberty rites

The author’s best informant, in ceremonial dress

A meal in the Men’s House

Bringing out the mariddo

A funeral ceremony (photograph by M. René Silz)

The Nambikwara group on the move

Sabané, the sorcerer

The chief of the Wakletoçu

The native method of carrying a baby

The siesta

A Nambikwara woman piercing mother-of-pearl from river shells to make ear-rings

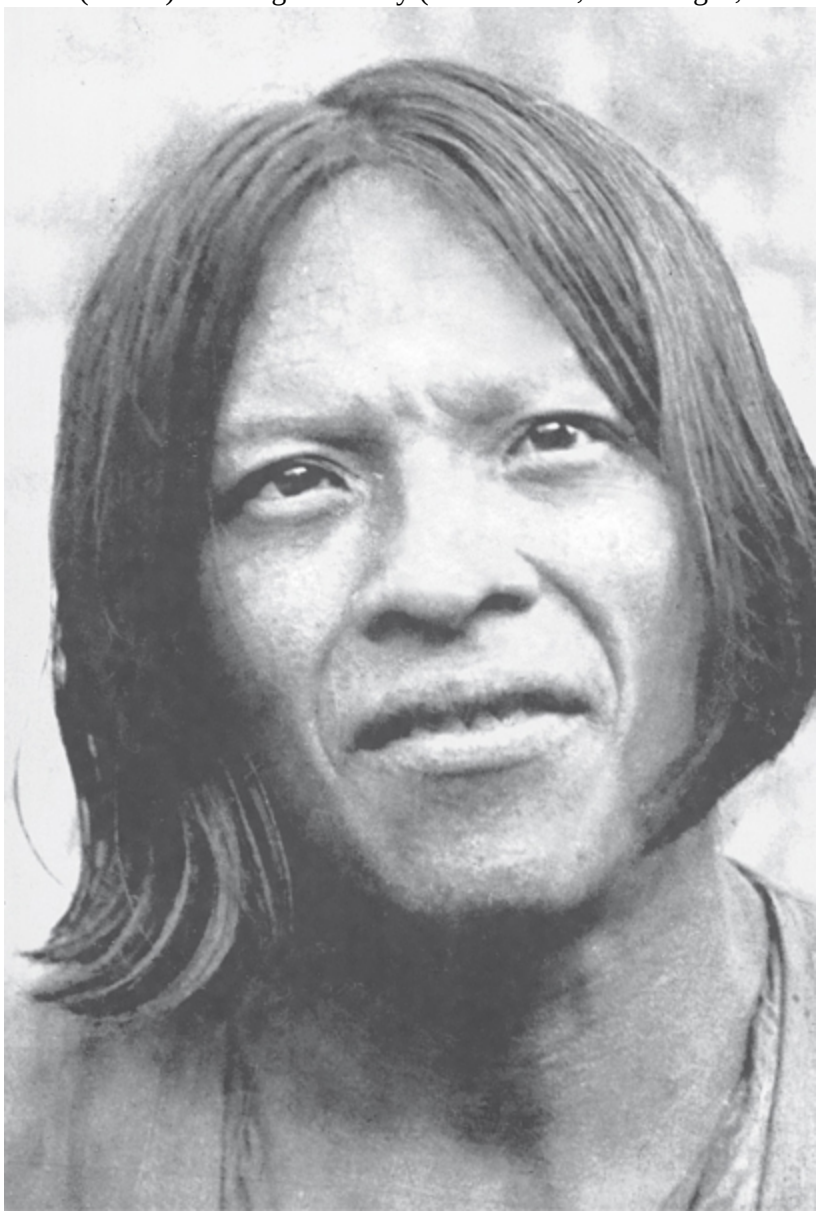
Day-dreaming

A Nambikwara smile

The Mundé village square

A Mundé woman with her child (its eyebrows are coated with wax in preparation for plucking)

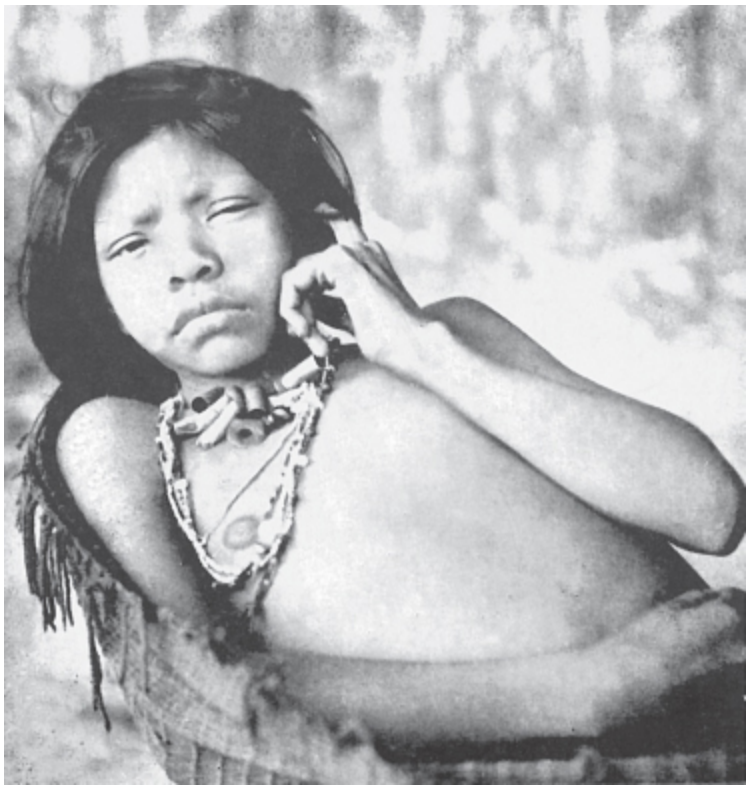
A Tupi-Kawahib man (Potien) skinning a monkey (note the belt, a recent gift, and the penis sheath)



Taperahi, the Tupi-Kawahib chief

Kunhatsin, Taperahi’s chief wife, carrying her child

Pwereza, Taperahi’s son



Penhana, the young wife shared by the two brothers

Maruabai, the co-wife (with her daughter, Kunhatsin) of Chief Taperahi