Introduction to the Work of

# MARCEL MAUSS

## Claude Lévi-Strauss

Translated by
Felicity Baker

ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL
London

*First published in 1950 as*
*Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss by*
*Presses Universitaires de France*

*This translation first published in 1987 by*
*Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd*
*11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE*

*Set in 10 on 13 point Trump Mediaeval*
*by Fontwise*
*and printed in Great Britain*
*by Thetford Press Ltd*
*Thetford, Norfolk*



*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

*Lévi-Strauss, Claude*
*Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss.*
*1. Mauss, Marcel*
*I. Title II. Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss. English*
*306'.092'4 GN21.M/*

*ISBN 0–7100–9066–8(p)*

# Contents

# Translator's note

*Les sciences de l'homme, les sciences humaines*: fields of inquiry and disciplinary boundaries are marked out differently in French and Anglo-American institutions; Claude Lévi-Strauss's writing internalises that difference and distance without minimising them. The essay's scope exceeds what is understood by the terms ethnology, ethnography, anthropology; the *sciences of man* and the *human sciences* are its context, and so these disciplinary groupings are not replaced by more 'naturally equivalent' names.

The *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* refers a number of times to works by Mauss collected 'in this volume'. The original *Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss* prefaces the earliest major collection of his writings, entitled *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1950; see bibliography for details). The contents of that

volume are available in English as three books: *The Gift*, *A General Theory of Magic*, and *Sociology and Psychology*. The present translation of Lévi-Strauss's prefatory essay is therefore adrift from the volume of which the original is a part. Nevertheless, the essay's occasional reference to the absent volume, perhaps momentarily distracting for the reader, is retained in the translation as being indispensable for historical reasons. It is necessary to preserve those references even for the correct understanding of the essay itself, since it analyses and interprets Mauss's thinking on the basis of the given selection of texts which are grouped together in *Sociologie et anthropologie*.

Certain other choices concerning the mode of presentation of this translation are governed by the work's historical purpose of documenting and clarifying Marcel Mauss's contribution to the thinking of this century. A brief explanation of some of these choices may be helpful.

First, I have repeated Lévi-Strauss's own device of giving all titles of works by Mauss in italic type, in the body of the text and in the notes, despite the fact that no work by Mauss was published singly as a book in the first instance. This departure from usage, which I limit strictly to works by Mauss, is intended as a simple visual sign of the recognition of a life's work disseminated in a notoriously fragmented form. It would in





any case be somewhat confusing for the English-language reader who already knows a work like *The Gift* to find it designated here as 'Essai sur le don'. Italics are therefore used consistently, even for extremely short pieces by Mauss. To set the record straight, however, the bibliography conforms throughout to the usual convention of distinguishing articles from books by reserving italic type for the latter.

For this essay's citations from the works of Mauss, existing English translations have been consulted with profit, and page references to these are given in the notes. However, for almost all these citations, I have given my own translations, only rarely adopting the already published version. That is because Lévi-Strauss sometimes slightly alters the terms to fit the structure of his own sentence (without, of course, distorting Mauss's thought). Given the depth of the essay's analysis of Mauss's thinking, I judged it appropriate to treat quotation – in the sole case of Lévi-Strauss quoting Mauss – as an element of the writing in which it is contained, and to translate it in continuity with that writing. For citations of writers other than Mauss, I have of course used any existing English versions, whether these be the originals or translations.

I have added numerous reminders, in the body of the essay, of the chronology of Mauss's writings; these reminders take the form of dates

inserted in brackets, following references to the titles of these writings. The essay's task of shedding light on a masterwork whose pervasive force in contemporary thinking could otherwise have passed often unrecognised, becomes on one level a practical matter of indicating dates, of stating who published what and exactly when, and whether by the spoken or the printed word. For the translator, that practical task is increased, since the present time (1950) of the essay's organisation of its own past (the first half of the century) is now, of course, the past time of the translation and its readers. The present time of the translation, on the other hand, is the time of Lévi-Strauss's teaching; a time when English-language readers have been able to read both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, and can fully appreciate the historical situation of this pivotal essay which itself has some of the qualities of a matrix, being composed as the making-manifest of its own matrix. I hope that the inclusion of dates through the essay will help the reader to keep this chronological layering in mind.

However, most of the information needed to illustrate the diachronic character of the essay has been relegated to the bibliography, in which I have tried as far as possible to give, on the one hand, precise details of first publication dates, and on the other hand, up-to-date details of accessible editions or English translations. In instances





where new work was first made public in lectures, spoken communications at conferences, and so on, I have worked on the assumption that the description of that event completes the title of the piece, and have therefore reproduced such descriptions as they are given in reference works, not translating those which are given in French; this applies to papers by Roman Jakobson, as well as by Mauss.

Translating involves as much 'giving, receiving, returning' as any other kind of writing, and the exchange could never be limited to that most sustained one between the original and the translation. I gratefully acknowledge the enlightening discussions I have had, about the translating of this essay's conceptual shifts from the fields of phonology and algebra to ethnology and sociology, with a linguist, a mathematician, and an anthropologist conversant with mathematics: G. C. Lepschy, J. C. Amson and F. L. Brett. The bibliography was completed with the valuable assistance of K. E. Swarbrick.

Felicity Baker

# Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss

THE TEACHING of Marcel Mauss, which remains highly esoteric while at the same time exerting a very deep influence, was one to which few can be compared. No acknowledgment of him can be proportionate to our debt, unless it comes from those who knew the man and listened to him. Only they can fully appreciate the productiveness of his thinking, which was so dense as to become opaque at times; and of his tortuous procedures, which would seem bewildering at the very moment when the most unexpected itinerary was getting to the heart of problems. I will not expand here on his role in French ethnological and sociological thinking; that has been examined elsewhere.[1] It is enough to recall that Mauss's influence is not limited to ethnographers, none of whom could claim to have escaped it, but extends also to linguists, psychologists, historians of religion and orientalists; so

that a whole constellation of French researchers in the social sciences and the human sciences have in some way got their bearings from him. For others, the written work remained too scattered and often hard to obtain. A chance meeting or a chance reading could generate lasting echoes: we could quite likely recognise some of these in Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Herskovits, Lloyd Warner, Redfield, Kluckhohn, Elkin, Held and many others. On the whole, the work and thought of Marcel Mauss have not taken effect directly, in spoken or written form, but rather through the mediation of colleagues and followers who were in regular or occasional contact with him. A collection of essays and lectures now remedies this situation:[2] a very incomplete record of Mauss's thought, which we must hope is only the first in a series of volumes in which his life's work can be apprehended at last in its full form – including everything already published and still unpublished, everything he wrote on his own or in collaboration with others.

Practical considerations determined the selection of studies grouped together in this first volume. However, certain aspects of a thought-system can already emerge from that random choice, and its richness and diversity are illustrated very well by these writings, even if not perfectly.



# I

THE FIRST thing that strikes us about Mauss's thought is what I would like to call its modernity. The essay *L'Idée de mort* (1926a) takes us to the heart of matters which psychosomatic medicine, as it is called, has only made topical in recent years. Of course, W. B. Cannon's physiological interpretation of the disturbances which he called homeostatic is based on work which dates from the First World War. But only much more recently did the famous biologist include in his theory those peculiar phenomena which seem to put the physiological and the social into unmediated contact.[1] From 1926 onwards, Mauss had been drawing attention to those phenomena; not, of course, as their discoverer, but as one of the first people to stress how genuine they are, how widespread, and above all, how extraordinarily important they are for the correct interpretation of relations between the individual and the group.

*Les Techniques du corps* (1934) is also inspired by that concern with the relations between individual and group (it is the dominant concern of contemporary ethnology). In stating the crucial value, for the sciences of man, of a study of the manner in which each society imposes a rigorously determined use of the body upon the individual, Mauss was announcing the most up-to-date concerns of the American Anthropological Society today, as expressed in the work of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and the majority of the young generation of American anthropologists. The social structure leaves its imprint on individuals through the training of the child's bodily needs and activities: 'Children are reared . . . to master their reflexes . . . fears are inhibited . . . the postures of the body, both at rest and in motion, are selected.'[2] The investigation of the way the social is projected on the individual must go right down to the deepest layer of conventions and modes of behaviour; in this area, nothing is futile, gratuitous or superfluous: 'Child-rearing is full of what are called details, but they are actually essentials.'[3] And again: 'The physical training of all ages and both sexes is made up of masses of details which pass unobserved; we must undertake to observe them.'[4]

So Mauss set out what has been the programme of modern ethnology for these last ten years; at the same time, he perceived the most significant





consequence of this new orientation of research, which is the bringing together of ethnology and psychoanalysis. For a man issuing from that intellectual and moral background – the pudicity of the neo-Kantianism which reigned in our universities at the end of the last century – much courage and clairvoyance were needed to go off in search, as he did, of 'vanished psychical states of our childhood', the products of 'the sexes and the flesh in contact',[5] and to realise that he was going to find himself 'in the midst of psychoanalysis, here probably quite well-founded.'[6] Hence the importance, fully perceived by him, of the moment and the methods of weaning, and of the way the baby is handled. He even adumbrates a classification of human groups into 'cradled people . . . uncradled people.'[7] To measure the newness of these propositions, one need only cite the names and the research of M. Mead, R. F. Benedict, C. Du Bois, C. Kluckhohn, D. Leighton, E. Erikson, K. Davis, J. Henry, and so on. Mauss put these propositions forward in 1934, the very year in which *Patterns of Culture*[8] came out, a work still far removed from Mauss's way of posing the problem; at that time, M. Mead was engaged in field-work in New Guinea, where she was working out the principles of a doctrine very close to that of Mauss, one which was destined to become famous and to exert an enormous influence.

It must be added that, from two different standpoints, Mauss remains ahead of all the later developments. When he opened the new territory of body techniques to ethnological research, his insight was not restricted to acknowledging the relevance of that kind of study for the problem of cultural integration; he was at the same time emphasising that body techniques have an intrinsic importance. But in that respect nothing has been done, or almost nothing. For ten or fifteen years now, ethnologists have been willing enough to attend to certain body disciplines, but only to the extent that they hoped, in so doing, to elucidate the mechanisms through which the group moulds individuals in its own image. In fact, no one has yet tackled the immense task which Mauss insisted was urgently necessary; that is, the compilation of an inventory and description of all the uses to which men have put their bodies throughout history, and above all, throughout the world, and to which they still do put them. We are collectors of the products of human industry, and of written or oral texts. But as for the very numerous and varied possibilities of that instrument which is the human body, we are as ignorant as ever, even though the body is universal and is at everyone's disposition; we only know about those possibilities of body use – always partial and limited – which come within the requirements of our particular culture.





However, any ethnologist who has worked in the field knows that those possibilities are surprisingly variable from group to group. The thresholds of excitability, the limits of resistance are different in every culture. 'Impossible' effort, 'intolerable' pain, 'unheard-of' pleasure are not so much a function of individual peculiarities as of criteria ratified by collective approval or disapproval. Every technique, every mode of behaviour, learned and transmitted by tradition, is founded on certain nervous and muscular synergies which constitute veritable systems, bound up with a whole sociological context. That is true of the humblest techniques, like lighting fires by friction or fashioning stone tools by knapping; and it is much more true of those grand constructs, simultaneously social and physical, which are the different kinds of gymnastics (including Chinese gymnastics, so different from our own, and the internal gymnastics of the ancient Maori, about which we know next to nothing); or the Chinese and Hindu breathing techniques; or the circus acts which are a very old patrimony of our own culture, and which we leave to the chance effects of personal callings and family traditions to preserve from extinction.

Such knowledge of the modes of body use among humans would, however, be particularly necessary for an age in which the development of the mechanical means at man's disposition tends

to deflect him from exercising and applying his bodily means in any domain except that of sport, which is an important part, but no more than a part, of the bodily comportments that Mauss had in mind; and one which is, moreover, variable from one group to another. It would be very welcome if an international organisation such as UNESCO would commit itself to carrying into effect the programme which Mauss mapped out in that paper. The publication of *International Archives of Body Techniques* would be of truly international benefit, providing an inventory of all the possibilities of the human body and of the methods of apprenticeship and training employed to build up each technique; for there is not one human group in the world which could not make an original contribution to such an enterprise. What is more, it is a common patrimony, one which is immediately accessible to all of humanity, with roots that go right back through the millennia, and with a practical value that remains and will always remain relevant; putting it at the disposition of one and all would do more than anything else could (because it takes the form of lived experiences) to make each one of us aware of our mental and physical connections with the whole of humanity. It would also be a project eminently well fitted for counteracting racial prejudices, since it would contradict the racialist conceptions which try to make out that man is a





product of his body, by demonstrating that it is the other way around: man has, at all times and in all places, been able to turn his body into a product of his techniques and his representations.

But there are other reasons yet which militate in favour of the enterprise, as well as ethical and practical ones. It would produce an unexpected wealth of information about migrations, cultural contacts and borrowings made in the distant past, for these are evidenced, not only by archaeological excavations or figured monuments, but also, and often much better, by seemingly insignificant gestures transmitted from one generation to the next and protected by their very insignificance. The placing of the male's hands when urinating, the preference for washing oneself in running or stagnant water (which survives in the preference for leaving the washbasin plugged or unplugged while the water is running) and so on; these are so many examples of an archaeology of body habits which, in modern Europe (and all the more elsewhere), provide the cultural historian with information as valuable as that of prehistory and philology.

Of that solidarity of past and present inscribed in the humblest and most concrete of our customs no one could be more aware than Mauss, who liked to discern the frontiers of Celtic expansion in the shape of bread in bakery windows. But in

stressing the importance of death by magic or of body techniques, he meant also to substantiate another type of solidarity, which provides the principal theme of another paper published in this volume: *Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie* (1924). In all these cases, we are dealing with an order of facts 'which should be studied without delay: those facts in which social nature is very directly linked to man's biological nature.'[9] These are facts of an exceptional kind which enable us to grapple with the problem of the links between psychology and sociology.

It was Ruth Benedict who taught both contemporary ethnologists and psychologists that the phenomena which they endeavour to describe can be described in a language common to both, borrowed from psychopathology. That fact on its own constitutes a mystery. Ten years earlier, Mauss had perceived the same thing, with such a prophetic lucidity that one can only blame the neglect of the social sciences in France for the fact that no one immediately exploited that immense domain once he had located it and opened the way to it. Indeed, as early as 1924, Mauss defined social life, for an audience of psychologists, as a 'world of symbolic relationships', and told them: 'Whereas you descry these cases of symbolism only quite rarely, and often within series of abnormal facts, we apprehend great numbers of





them all the time, and within immense series of normal facts.' The whole thesis of *Patterns of Culture* is anticipated in that formula, although the author certainly never knew it; and that is a pity, for if Ruth Benedict and her school had known it, they would have been better able to defend themselves against reproaches which were occasionally well earned.

As a matter of fact, the American psychosociological school was in danger of trapping itself in circular thinking, by striving to define a system of correlations between the group culture and individual psychical structure. That school had looked to the psychoanalytic discipline to indicate which basic mediations are expressions of the group culture and also determinants of lasting individual attitudes. From that moment on, ethnologists and psychoanalysts were to be drawn into an interminable discussion of the respective priority of each factor. Does a society get its institutional characteristics from the individual modalities of its members' personalities, or are those personalities explained by certain aspects of infant care which are themselves cultural phenomena? The debate is insoluble, as long as it is not noticed that the two orders are not linked together by a cause-effect relationship (whichever respective position is attributed to each), but that the psychological formulation is only a translation, on to the level of individual psychical

structure, of what is strictly speaking a sociological structure. That is, moreover, something that Margaret Mead most opportunely emphasises in a recent publication,[10] where she shows that Rorschach tests, when applied to indigenous people, teach the ethnologist nothing he had not already learned by strictly ethnological methods of investigation, even though they may be able to provide a useful psychological translation of results established independently. It is that subordinate relation of the psychological to the sociological which Mauss effectively illuminates. Doubtless Ruth Benedict never claimed to reduce types of cultures to psychopathological disturbances, and even less to explain the former by the latter. All the same, it was unwise to use psychiatric terminology to characterise social phenomena, when the relationship of the two domains would be worked out more accurately the other way around. It is natural for society to express itself symbolically in its customs and its institutions; normal modes of individual behaviour are, on the contrary, *never symbolic in themselves*: they are the elements out of which a symbolic system, which can only be collective, builds itself. It is only abnormal modes of behaviour which, because desocialised and in some way left to their own devices, realise the illusion of an autonomous symbolism on the level of the individual. To put it differently, abnormal modes of





individual behaviour, in a given social group, do achieve symbolic status, but on a plane which is inferior to that on which the group expresses itself; and within a different order of magnitude, if I can put it that way: an order really incommensurable to that of the group's self-expression. So it is both at once natural and inevitable that individual modes of psychopathological behaviour, on the one hand symbolic and on the other hand (by definition) constituting a different system from that of the group, should offer each society a sort of equivalent, twice diminished (by being individual and by being pathological), of forms of symbolism different from its own, and yet vaguely evocative of normal forms brought about on the collective scale.

Perhaps we could take this still further. The domain of the pathological is never identical to the domain of the individual, since the different types of disturbance fall into categories, can be subjected to classification, and their predominant forms are not the same from one society to another or from one historical moment to another. The reduction of the social to the psychological, attempted by some people by way of psychopathology, would be seen to be even more illusory than we have so far conceded if we had to acknowledge that each society possesses its preferred forms of mental disturbance, and that these latter are, no less than the normal

forms, a function of a collective order which is not even neutral in relation to exceptions.

In his essay on magic, to which I shall turn later, and which can only be equitably judged if we take its date into account, Mauss notes that, even if 'the magician's simulation is of the same order as that which is observed in neurotic states', it is nonetheless true that the categories from which witch doctors are recruited: 'the disabled; the ecstatic; nervous types and outsiders, really constitute kinds of social classes'. And he adds: 'What gives them magical properties is not so much their individual physical character as the society's attitude towards people of their kind.'[11] By those words, Mauss poses a problem which he does not resolve, but which we can try to explore in his footsteps.

It is convenient to compare the shaman in his trance, or the protagonist of a scene of possession, to a neurotic. I have done so myself,[12] and the parallel is legitimate in the sense that some common elements very probably do occur in these two types of states. Nevertheless, some reservations are necessary. In the first place, psychiatrists, when presented with filmed documents of dances of possession, say that they cannot reduce such modes of behaviour to any form whatever of the neuroses which they customarily observe. On the other hand, and above





all, the ethnographers who have contact with witch doctors, or with persons habitually or occasionally subject to possession, challenge the assumption that these individuals, in every respect normal outside the socially-defined circumstances in which they go into their manifestations of possession, can be considered ill. In the societies which have possession rites, possession is a mode of behaviour that everybody can adopt; the forms this behaviour can take are laid down by tradition, and its value is sanctioned by collective participation. By what criterion should we treat as abnormal some individuals who match the group average, who can draw on all their mental and physical capacities when going about their everyday life, and who occasionally display a meaningful and socially-approved mode of behaviour?

The contradiction I have just stated can be resolved in two different ways. Either the modes of behaviour described by the names of 'trance' or 'possession' have no connection with the behaviour that we, in our own society, call psychopathological, or else they can be considered as being of the same type. In the latter case it is their connection with pathological states that we need to consider as contingent, and as resulting from a condition peculiar to the society in which we live. In the latter event, we would be faced with a second alternative: either, that the alleged mental

illnesses must be considered as not properly belonging in the medical domain but as the effect of sociological factors on the behaviour of individuals whose history and personal constitution have partially dissociated them from the group; or, that we should recognise the presence of a truly pathological state in these patients, but one of physiological origin, a state which just creates a fertile ground or, if you like, 'sensitises' the subject for certain symbolic modes of behaviour for which a sociological interpretation would still be the only appropriate thing.

There is no need to open a debate of that order; I have just evoked that alternative briefly so as to show that a purely sociological theory of mental disturbance (or what we consider to be such) could be developed, without fear of seeing the physiologists one day uncover a biochemical substratum for the neuroses. Even on that hypothesis the theory would remain valid. And it is a relatively easy matter to imagine the internal organisation of such a theory. Any culture can be considered as a combination of symbolic systems headed by language, the matrimonial rules, the economic relations, art, science and religion. All the systems seek to express certain aspects of physical reality and social reality, and even more, to express the links that those two types of reality have with each other and those that occur among the symbolic systems themselves. The fact that





the systems never can achieve that expression in a fully satisfying and (above all) equivalent form, is, first, a result of the conditions of functioning proper to each system, in that the systems always remain incommensurable; second, it is a result of the way that history introduces into those systems elements from different systems, determines shifting of one society towards another, and uneven intervals in the relative evolutionary rhythm of each particular system. So no society is ever wholly and completely symbolic; that is because a society is always a spatial-temporal given, and therefore subject to the impact of other societies and of earlier states of its own development; it is also because, even in some hypothetical society which we might imagine as having no links with any other and no dependence on its own past, the different systems of symbols which all combine to constitute the culture or civilisation would never become reducible to one another (the translation of one system into another being conditioned by the introduction of constants with irrational values, that is, values external to the two systems). Instead of saying that a society is never completely symbolic, it would be more accurate to say that it can never manage to give all its members, to the same degree, the means whereby they could give their services fully to the building of a symbolic structure which is only realisable (in the context

of normal thinking) in the dimension of social life. For, strictly speaking, the person whom we call sane is the one who is capable of alienating himself, since he consents to an existence in a world definable only by the self-other relationship.[13] The saneness of the individual mind implies participation in social life, just as the refusal to enter into it (but most importantly, the refusal to do so in the ways that it imposes) corresponds to the onset of mental disturbance.

Any society at all is therefore comparable to a universe in which only discrete masses are highly structured. So, in any society, it would be inevitable that a percentage (itself variable) of individuals find themselves placed 'off system', so to speak, or between two or more irreducible systems. The group seeks and even requires of those individuals that they figuratively represent certain forms of compromise which are not realisable on the collective plane; that they simulate imaginary transitions, embody incompatible syntheses. So, in all their apparently aberrant modes of behaviour, individuals who are 'ill' are just transcribing a state of the group, and making one or another of its constants manifest. Their peripheral position relative to a local system does not mean that they are not integral parts of the total system; they are, and just as much as the local system is. To be more precise, if they were not docile witnesses of this sort, the





total system would be in danger of disintegrating into its local systems. It can therefore be said that for every society, the relation between normal and special modes of behaviour is one of complementarity. That is obvious in the case of shamanism and spirit-possession; but it would be no less true of modes of behaviour which our own society refuses to group and legitimise as *vocations*. For there are individuals who, for social, historical or physiological reasons (it does not much matter which), are sensitive to the contradictions and gaps in the social structure; and our society hands over to those individuals the task of realising a statistical equivalent (by constituting that complement, 'abnormality', which alone can supply a definition of 'the normal').

We can see quite well how and why a witch doctor is an element of social equilibrium; the same has to be acknowledged of the dances or ceremonies of possession.[14] But if my hypothesis is correct, it would follow that the forms of mental disturbances characteristic of each society, and the percentage of individuals who are affected by these disturbances, are a constitutive element of the particular type of equilibrium proper to the society in question. Nadel, in a remarkable study published recently, remarks firstly that 'no shaman is, in daily life, an "abnormal" individual, a neurotic or a paranoiac; if he were, he would be classed as a lunatic, not

respected as a priest'; he then goes on to maintain that a relationship does exist between pathological disturbances and shamanistic behavioural modes; but that that relationship consists less of an assimilation of shamanistic behaviour into pathological patterns than of a need to define disturbance as a function of shamanism. For the very reason that shamanistic behaviour is normal, certain modes of behaviour can remain normal in shamanistic societies which, elsewhere, would be considered (and would in fact be) pathological. A comparative study of shamanistic and non-shamanistic groups, in a restricted geographical area, shows that shamanism could play a double role with respect to psychopathologically disposed personalities: on the one hand exploiting the disposition, but on the other hand, channelling and stabilising it. Indeed, it seems that the frequency of psychoses and neuroses tends to rise, in non-shamanistic groups, under the influence of contact with civilisation; whereas in shamanistic groups it is shamanism itself which increases, but without any increase in mental disturbances.[15] It can thus be seen that the ethnologists who seek to dissociate certain rituals completely from any psychopathological context are inspired by a somewhat timorous goodwill. The analogy is manifest, and perhaps the links are even measurable. That does not mean that the societies called





primitive place themselves under the authority of madmen; it rather means that we ourselves, groping in the dark, treat sociological phenomena as ascribable to pathology, whereas they have nothing to do with pathology; or at the very least, we are dealing with two aspects which must be kept rigorously dissociated. In fact it is the very notion of *mental illness* which is in question. For if, as Mauss asserts, the mental and the social are one and the same, it would be absurd, in the cases where the social and the physiological come into direct contact, to apply to one of those two orders a notion (such as illness) which has no meaning except within the other order.

No doubt some will judge that digression imprudent; but by letting myself be drawn to and even beyond the extreme limits of Mauss's thinking, I only meant to show the richness and productiveness of the themes he offers to his readers' or listeners' meditation. In that connection, his claim that symbolism is the sole domain of the sociological disciplines may have been (as it was by Durkheim) imprudently formulated. For, in the paper *Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie*, Mauss still thinks it possible to develop a sociological theory of symbolism, whereas it is obvious that what is needed is a symbolic origin of society. As we refuse to allow that all levels of mental life can be included within the competence of psychology,

so we will accordingly have to concede that psychology alone (in combination with biology) can account for the origin of the basic functions. That does not make it any the less true that all the illusions which today get attached to the notions of 'modal personality' or of 'national character', and the vicious circles that come with them, derive from the belief that individual character is symbolic in itself. Whereas, as Mauss advised us (and psychopathological phenomena excepted), it only provides the primary material, or the elements, of a symbolism which – as I said above – never manages to reach completion, even on the level of the group. Extending the methods and procedures of psychoanalysis to individual psychical processes on the normal plane cannot, any more successfully than their use in pathology, fix the image of the social structure; that would mean a miraculous abridgement for ethnology – a self-avoidance.

Individual psychical processes do not reflect the group; even less do they pre-form the group. If we acknowledge that they complete the group, that will be a quite adequate legitimation of the value and importance of the studies that are being pursued in that direction today. That *complementarity* of individual psychical structure and social structure is the basis of the fruitful collaboration, called for by Mauss, which has come to pass between ethnology and psychology. But





that collaboration will only remain valid if ethnology continues to claim a leading place for the description and objective analysis of customs and institutions; for the psychological study in depth of their subjective aspects can consolidate the leading position of objective analysis, but can never relegate it to the background.

# II

THOSE SEEM to me to be the essential points which can still usefully hold our attention in the three essays *Psychologie et sociologie* (1924), *L'Idée de mort* (1926) and *Les Techniques du corps* (1936). The three other essays which make up this book (and even form the larger part of it) are the *Théorie de la magie* (1902–3), the *Essai sur le don* (1923–4), and *La Notion de personne* (1938).[1] These three essays bring to the fore another, even more decisive, aspect of Mauss's thinking, namely, the notion of the total social fact; this aspect would have emerged more clearly if we could have punctuated the twenty years between *La Magie* and *Le Don* with a few landmarks: *L'Art et le mythe* (1909); *Anna-Virâj* (1911); *Les Origines de la notion de monnaie* (1914a); *Dieux Ewhe de la monnaie et du change* (1914b); *Une Forme archaïque de contrat chez les Thraces* (1921b); *Commentaires sur un texte de*





*Posidonius* (1925). The notion of total social fact would be further clarified if the major *Essai sur le don* had been accompanied by texts that move in the same direction: *De Quelques formes primitives de classification* (1903, in collaboration with Durkheim); *Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimo* (1904–5); *Gift, Gift* (1924b); *Parentés à plaisanteries* (1926b); *Wette, wedding* (1928); *Biens masculins et féminins en droit celtique* (1929a); *Les Civilisations* (1929b); *Fragment d'un plan de sociologie générale descriptive* (1934).[2]

It really would be a great mistake to isolate the *Essai sur le don* from the rest of the work, even though it is quite undeniably the masterwork of Marcel Mauss, his most justly famous writing, and the work whose influence has been the deepest. It is the *Essai sur le don* which introduced and imposed the notion of *total social fact*; but it is not hard to see how that notion is linked to considerations, only apparently different, which I mentioned in the preceding pages. It could even be said to command those considerations, since it is like them but is more inclusive and systematic in the way that it arises from the concern to define social reality, or, better, to define the social *as* reality. Now the social is only real when integrated in a system, and that is a first aspect of the notion of total fact; 'After sociologists have, as they must, analysed and abstracted rather too

much, they must then force themselves to recompose the whole.'[3] One might be tempted to apprehend the total fact through any one aspect of society exclusively: the familial aspect, the technical, economic, juridical or religious aspect; that would be an error; but the total fact does not emerge as total simply by reintegrating the discontinuous aspects. It must also be embodied in an individual experience, and that, from two different viewpoints: first, in an individual history which would make it possible to 'observe the comportment of total beings, not divided up into their faculties';[4] and after that, in what I would like to call (retrieving the archaic meaning of a term whose applicability to the present instance is obvious) an *anthropology*, that is, a system of interpretation accounting for the aspects of all modes of behaviour simultaneously, physical, physiological, psychical and sociological, 'Only to study that fragment of our life which is our life in society is not enough.'

The total social fact therefore proves to be three-dimensional. It must make the properly sociological dimension coincide with its multiple synchronic aspects; with the historical or diachronic dimension; and finally, with the physio-psychological dimension. Only in individuals can these three dimensions be brought together. If you commit yourself to this 'study of the concrete which is a study of the whole',[5] you cannot fail to





note that 'what is true is not prayer or law, but the Melanesian of this or that island, Rome, Athens.'[6]

Consequently, the notion of total fact is in direct relation to the twofold concern (which until now we had encountered on its own), to link the social and the individual on the one hand, and the physical (or physiological) and the psychical on the other. But we are better able to understand the reason for it, which is also twofold. On the one hand, it is at the end of a whole series of reductive procedures that we can grasp the total fact, which includes: (1) different modes of the social (juridical, economic, aesthetic, religious and so on); (2) different moments of an individual history (birth, childhood, education, adolescence, marriage, and so on); (3) different forms of expression, from physiological phenomena such as reflexes, secretions, decreased and increased rates of movement, to unconscious categories and conscious representations, both individual and collective. All of that is definitely social, in one sense, since it is only in the form of a social fact that these elements, so diverse in kind, can acquire a global signification and become a whole. But the converse is no less true, for the only guarantee we can have that a total fact corresponds to reality, rather than being an arbitrary accumulation of more or less true details, is that it can be grasped in a concrete experience: first, in that of a society

localised in space or time, 'Rome, Athens'; but also, in that of any individual at all in any one at all of the societies thus localised, 'the Melanesian of this or that island.' So it really is true that, in one sense, any psychological phenomenon is a sociological phenomenon; that the mental is identified with the social. But on the other hand, in a different sense, it is all quite the reverse: the proof of the social cannot be other than mental; to put it another way, we can never be sure of having reached the meaning and the function of an institution, if we are not in a position to relive its impact on an individual consciousness. As that impact is an integral part of the institution, any valid interpretation must bring together the objectivity of historical or comparative analysis and the subjectivity of lived experience. When I followed, earlier, what seemed to me to be one of the directions of Mauss's thinking, I arrived at the hypothesis that the psychical and the social are complementary. That complementarity is not static, as would be that of two halves of a puzzle; it is dynamic and it arises from the fact that the psychical is both at once a simple *element of signification* for a symbolic system which transcends it, and the only *means of verification* of a reality whose manifold aspects can only be grasped as a synthesis inside it.

There is much more to the notion of total social fact, therefore, than a recommendation that in-





vestigators remember to link agricultural techniques and ritual, or boat-building, the form of the family agglomeration and the rules of distribution of fishing hauls. To call the social fact *total* is not merely to signify that *everything observed is part of the observation*, but also, and above all, that in a science in which the observer is of the same nature as his object of study, *the observer himself is a part of his observation*. I am not alluding, here, to the modifications which ethnological observation inevitably produces in the functioning of the society where it occurs, for that difficulty is not peculiar to the social sciences; it is encountered wherever anyone sets out to make fine measures, that is, wherever the observer (either he himself, or else his means of observation) is of the same order of magnitude as the observed object. In any case, it was physicians who brought that difficulty to light, and not sociologists; it merely imposes itself on sociologists in the same way. The situation particular to the social sciences is different in nature; the difference is to do with the intrinsic character of the object of study, which is that it is object and subject both at once; or both 'thing' and 'representation', to speak the language of Durkheim and Mauss. It could doubtless be said that the physical and natural sciences are in the same circumstance, since any element of the real is an object, and yet it triggers representations; and

that a full explanation of the object should account simultaneously for its own structure and for the representations through which our grasp of its properties is mediated. In theory, that is true; a total chemistry should explain not just the form and the distribution of a strawberry's molecules, but how there results from the arrangement a unique flavour. However, history can prove that a satisfactory science does not need to go so far, and that for centuries on end, and even millennia perhaps (since we do not know when it will complete its work), it can progress in the knowledge of its object by virtue of an eminently unstable distinction between qualities pertaining to the object which are the only ones that the science seeks to explain, and other qualities which are a function of the subject, and which need not be taken into consideration.

When Mauss speaks of total social facts, he implies, on the contrary, (if I am interpreting him correctly) that that easy and effective dichotomy is denied to the sociologist, or at least, that it could only correspond to a temporary and transient state of the development of the science. An appropriate understanding of a social fact requires that it be grasped *totally*, that is, from outside, like a thing; but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding (conscious or unconscious) that we would have of it, if, being inexorably human, we were living the





fact as indigenous people instead of observing it as ethnographers. The problematic thing is to know how it is possible to fulfil that ambition, which does not consist only of grasping an object from outside and inside simultaneously, but also requires much more; for the insider's grasp (that of the indigenous person, or at least that of the observer reliving the indigenous person's experience) needs to be transposed into the language of the outsider's grasp, providing certain elements of a whole which, to be valid, has to be presented in a systematic and coordinated way.

The task would not be feasible if the distinction between the objective and the subjective, rejected by the social sciences, were as rigorous as it has to be when the physical sciences provisionally allow it. But that is precisely the difference: the physical sciences bow (temporarily) to a distinction that they intend shall be rigorous, whereas the social sciences reject (permanently) a distinction which could only be a hazy one. I should like to explain further what I mean by that. I mean that, in so far as the distinction is, as a theoretical distinction, an impossible one, it can in practice be pushed much further, to the point where one of its terms becomes negligible, at least relative to the order of magnitude of the observation. The subject itself – once the object-subject distinction is posited – can then be split and duplicated in the same way, and so on without end, without ever

being reduced to nothing. Sociological observation, seemingly sentenced by the insurmountable antinomy that we isolated in the last paragraph, *extricates itself* by dint of the subject's capacity for indefinite self-objectification, that is to say (without ever quite abolishing itself as subject) for projecting outside itself ever-diminishing fractions of itself. Theoretically, at least, this fragmentation is limitless, except for the persistent implication of the existence of the two extremes as the condition of its possibility.

The prominent place of ethnography in the sciences of man, which explains the role it already plays in some countries, under the name of social and cultural anthropology, as inspirer of a new humanism, derives from the fact that it offers this unlimited process of objectification of the subject, which is so difficult for the individual to effect; and offers it in a concrete, experimental form. The thousands of societies which exist or have existed on the earth's surface are human, and on that basis we share in them in a subjective way; we could have been born into them, and so we can seek to understand them as if we were. But at the same time, all of them taken together (as compared to any one of them on its own) attest the subject's capacity to objectify himself in practically unlimited proportions, since the society which is the reference group, which constitutes only a tiny fraction of the given, is itself





always exposed to being subdivided into two different societies, one of which promptly joins the enormous mass of that which, for the other one, has and always will have the status of object; and so it goes on indefinitely. Any society different from our own has the status of object; any group of our own society, other than the group we come from ourselves, is object; and even every custom of our own group to which we do not adhere. That limitless series of objects constitutes, in ethnography, the Object, and is something that the individual subject would have to pull painfully away from himself, if the diversity of mores and customs did not present him with a prior fragmenting. But never could the historical and geographical closing of gaps induce him to forget (at the risk of annihilating the results of his efforts) that all those objects proceed from him, and that the most objectively conducted analysis of them could not fail to reintegrate them inside the analyst's subjectivity.

The ethnographer, having embarked on that work of identification, is always threatened by the tragic risk of falling victim to a *misunderstanding*; that is, the subjective grasp he reaches has nothing in common with that of the indigenous individual, beyond the bald fact of being subjective. That difficulty would be insoluble, subjectivities being, in hypothetical terms, incompar-

different subjectivities are insoluble

able and incommunicable, if the opposition of self and other could not be surmounted on a terrain which is also the meeting place of the objective and the subjective; I mean the unconscious. Indeed, on the one hand, the laws of unconscious activity are always outside the subjective grasp (we can reach conscious awareness of them, but only as an object); and yet, on the other hand, it is those laws that determine the modes of their intelligibility.

So it is not surprising that Mauss, imbued with a sense of the necessity for a close collaboration between sociology and psychology, referred constantly to the unconscious as providing the common and specific character of social facts: 'In magic, as in religion, it is the unconscious ideas which are the active ones.'[7] In the essay on magic from which that quotation is taken, we can see an effort, doubtless still hesitant, to formulate ethnological problems by other means than through 'rigid, abstract categories of our language and our thinking'; to do so in terms of a 'non-intellectualist psychology' foreign to our 'adult European understanding.' It would be quite mistaken to perceive that as concordant (before the fact) with Lévy-Bruhl's idea of a prelogical mentality, an idea that Mauss was never to accept. We must rather seek its meaning in the attempt he himself made, in connection with the notion of *mana*, to reach a sort of 'fourth dimension' of the mind, a





[Lacan]

level where the notions of 'unconscious category' and 'category of collective thinking' would be synonymous.

Mauss's perception was accurate, therefore, when from 1902 he affirmed that 'in sum, as soon as we come to the representation of magical properties, we are in the presence of phenomena similar to those of language.'[8] For it is linguistics, and most particularly structural linguistics, which has since familiarised us with the idea that the fundamental phenomena of mental life, the phenomena that condition it and determine its most general forms, are located on the plane of unconscious thinking. The unconscious would thus be the mediating term between self and others. Going down into the givens of the unconscious, the extension of our understanding, if I may put it thus, is not a movement towards ourselves; we reach a level which seems strange to us, not because it harbours our most secret self, but (much more normally) because, without requiring us to move outside ourselves, it enables us to coincide with forms of activity which are both at once *ours* and *other*: which are the condition of all the forms of mental life of all men at all times. Thus, the grasp (which can only be objective) of the unconscious forms of mental activity leads, nevertheless, to subjectivisation; since, in a word, it is the same type of operation which in psychoanalysis allows us to win back

our most estranged self, and in ethnological inquiry gives us access to the most foreign other as to another self. In both cases, the same problem is posed; that of a communication sought after, in the one instance between a subjective and an objective self, and in the other instance between an objective self and a subjective other. And, in both cases also, the condition of success is the most rigorously positive search for the unconscious itineraries of that encounter; itineraries traced once and for all in the innate structure of the human mind and in the particular and irreversible history of individuals or groups.

In the last analysis, therefore, the ethnological problem is a problem of communication; and that realisation must be all that is required to show the radical separation of the path Mauss follows when he identifies *unconscious* with *collective*, from the path of Jung, which one might be tempted to define the same way. For it is not the same thing, to define the unconscious as a category of collective thinking, and to divide it up into sectors according to the individual or collective character of the content attributed to it. In both cases, the unconscious is conceived as a symbolic system; but for Jung, the unconscious is not reduced to the system; it is filled full of symbols, and even filled with symbolised things which form a kind of substratum to it. But that substratum is either innate or acquired. If it is





innate, one must object that, without a theological hypothesis, it is inconceivable that the content coming from experience should precede it; if it is acquired, the problem of the hereditary character of an acquired unconscious would be no less awesome than that of acquired biological features. In fact, it is not a matter of translating an extrinsic given into symbols, but of reducing to their nature as a symbolic system things which never fall outside that system except to fall straight into incommunicability. Like language, the social *is* an autonomous reality (the same one, moreover); symbols are more real than what they symbolise, the signifier precedes and determines the signified. We will encounter this problem again in connection with *mana*.

The revolutionary character of the *Essai sur le don* (1923–4) is that it sets us on that path. The facts it puts forward are not new discoveries. Two years before, G. Davy had analysed and discussed potlatch on the basis of the enquiries of Boas and Swanton, whose importance Mauss himself had taken care to emphasise in his teaching even before 1914,[9] and the whole of the *Essai sur le don* emerges, in the most direct way, out of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, also published in 1922, which was to lead Malinowski himself, independently, to conclusions very close to those of Mauss.[10] That is a parallel which might induce us to see the indigenous

Melanesians themselves as the real authors of the modern theory of reciprocity. So what is the source of the extraordinary power of those disorganised pages of the *Essai*, which look a little as if they are still in the draft stage, with their very odd juxtaposition of impressionistic notations and (usually compressed into a critical apparatus that dwarfs the text) inspired erudition, which gathers American, Indian, Celtic, Greek or Oceanian references seemingly haphazardly, and yet always equally penetratingly? Few have managed to read the *Essai sur le don* without feeling the whole gamut of the emotions that Malebranche described so well when recalling his first reading of Descartes: the pounding heart, the throbbing head, the mind flooded with the imperious, though not yet definable, certainty of being present at a decisive event in the evolution of science.

What happened in that essay, for the first time in the history of ethnological thinking, was that an effort was made to transcend empirical observation and to reach deeper realities. For the first time, the social ceases to belong to the domain of pure quality – anecdote, curiosity, material for moralising description or for scholarly comparison – and becomes a system, among whose parts connections, equivalences and interdependent aspects can be discovered. First, it is the products of social activity, whether technical, economic,





ritual, aesthetic or religious (tools, manufactured products, foodstuffs, magical formulae, ornaments, chants, dances and myths), which are made comparable to one another through that common character they all have of being transferable; the modes of their transferability can be analysed and classified, and even when they seem inseparable from certain types of values, they are reducible to more fundamental forms, which are of a general nature. Furthermore, these social products are not only comparable, but often substitutable, in so far as different values can replace one another in the same operation. And, above all, it is the operations themselves which admit reduction to a small number. However diverse the operations may seem when seen through the events of social life – birth, initiation, marriage, contract, death or succession, and however arbitrary they may seem in the number and distribution of the individuals that they involve as members-elect, intermediaries or donors – it is these operations, above all else, which always authorise a reduction to a smaller number of operations, groups or persons, in which there finally remain only the fundamental terms of an equilibrium, diversely conceived and differently realised according to the type of society under scrutiny. So the types become definable by these intrinsic characteristics; and they become comparable to one another, since those character-

istics are no longer located in a qualitative order, but in the number and the arrangement of elements which are themselves constant in all the types. To take an example from a scholar who, perhaps better than anyone else, has managed to understand and exploit the possibilities opened up by this method:[11] the interminable series of celebrations and gifts which accompany marriage in Polynesia, which involve tens or even hundreds of persons and seem to defy empirical description, can be broken down into thirty or thirty-five prestations effected among five lineages which are in a constant relation to one another, and are decomposable into four cycles of reciprocity between the lineages A and B, A and C, A and D, and A and E. The total operation expresses a certain type of social structure such that, for example, there are no cycles allowed between B and C, or between E and B or D, or, finally, between E and C, whereas a different form of society would give these cycles pride of place. The method is so strictly applicable that, if an error appeared in the solution to the equations obtained from it, it would be more likely to be imputable to a gap in knowledge about the indigenous institutions than to a miscalculation. Thus, in the example just cited, we can ascertain that the cycle between A and B is opened by a prestation having no counterpart; that would at once lead us to seek, if we were not already aware





of it, the presence of a unilateral action, prior to the matrimonial ceremonies, although directly related to them. Such, precisely, is the role played in that society by the abduction of the fiancée, whose first prestation represents – according to the indigenous terminology itself – the 'compensation'. So the abduction could have been inferred, had it not been a matter of observation.

It will be noted that that operator technique is very close to that which Trubeckoj and Jakobson were perfecting, at the same time as Mauss was writing the *Essai*, and which was to enable them to found structural linguistics; for them too, it was a matter of distinguishing a purely phenomenological given, on which scientific analysis has no hold, from an infrastructure simpler than that given, to which the given owes its whole reality.[12] Thanks to the notions of 'optional variants', 'combinatory variants', 'terms in a system or set' and 'neutralisation', phonological analysis was precisely to create the possibility of defining a language by a small number of constant relations; the diversity and apparent complexity of its phonetic system merely illustrate the possible range of authorised combinations.

The *Essai sur le don* therefore inaugurates a new era for the social sciences, just as phonology did for linguistics. The importance of that double event (in which Mauss's part unfortunately remained in the outline stage) can best be compared

to the discovery of combinatorial analysis for modern mathematical thinking. It is one of the great misfortunes of contemporary ethnology that Mauss never undertook to exploit his discovery, and that he thus unconsciously incited Malinowski (of whom we may, without prejudice to his memory, acknowledge that he was a better observer than theorist) to launch out alone upon the elaboration of the corresponding system, on the basis of the same facts and analogous conclusions, which the two men had reached independently.

It is difficult to know in what direction Mauss would have developed his doctrine, if he had been willing. The principal interest of one of his last works, *La Notion de personne* (1938), also published in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, is not so much in the argumentation, which we can find cursory and at times careless, as in the tendency which emerges in it to extend to the diachronic order a technique of permutations which the *Essai sur le don* had rather conceived as a function of synchronic phenomena. In any event, Mauss would probably have encountered some difficulties if he had tried to take the system to a further level of elaboration; we will shortly see why. But he certainly would not have given it the regressive form that Malinowski was to give it; for while Mauss construed the notion of *function* following the example of algebra, implying, that





is, that social values are knowable *as functions of* one another, Malinowski transforms the meaning along the lines of what could seem to be a naïve empiricism, in that it no longer designates anything more than the practical usefulness for society of its customs and institutions. Whereas Mauss had in mind a *constant relation* between phenomena, which would be the site of their explanation, Malinowski merely wonders *what they are useful for*, to seek a justification for them. Such a posing of the problem annihilates all the previous advances, since it reintroduces an apparatus of assumptions having no scientific value.

The most recent developments in the social sciences, on the other hand, attest that Mauss's was the only way of posing the problem that was well founded; these new developments give us cause to hope for the progressive mathematisation of the field. In certain essential domains, such as that of kinship, the analogy with language, so strongly asserted by Mauss, could enable us to discover the precise rules by which, in any type of society, cycles of reciprocity are formed whose automatic laws are henceforth known, enabling the use of deductive reasoning in a domain which seemed subject to the most total arbitrariness. On the other hand, by associating more and more closely with linguistics, eventually to make a vast science of communic-

ations, social anthropology can hope to benefit from the immense prospects opened up to linguistics itself, through the application of mathematical reasoning to the study of phenomena of communication.[13] Already, we know that a large number of ethnological and sociological problems, some on the level of morphology, some even on the level of art or religion, are only waiting upon the goodwill of mathematicians who could enable ethnologists collaborating with them to take decisive steps forward, if not yet to a solution of those problems, at least to a preliminary unification of them, which is the condition of their solution.



# III

WHY DID Mauss halt at the edge of those immense possibilities, like Moses conducting his people all the way to a promised land whose splendour he would never behold? I am impelled to seek the reason, not from any wish to criticise, but out of a duty not to let the most fruitful aspect of his thinking be lost or vitiated. Mauss might have been expected to produce the twentieth-century social sciences' *Novum Organum*;[1] he held all the guidelines for it, but it has only come to be revealed in fragmented form. An omission must no doubt explain this. There must be some crucial move, somewhere, that Mauss missed out.

A curious aspect of the argumentation of the *Essai sur le don* will put us on the track of this difficulty. In this essay, Mauss seems – rightly – to be controlled by a logical certainty, namely, that *exchange* is the common denominator of a

large number of apparently heterogeneous social activities. But exchange is not something he can perceive on the level of the facts. Empirical observation finds not exchange, but only, as Mauss himself says, 'three obligations: giving, receiving, returning.'[2] So the whole theory calls for the existence of a structure, only fragments of which are delivered by experience – just its scattered members, or rather its elements. If exchange is necessary, but not given, then it must be constructed. How? By applying to the isolated parts which are the only present elements, a source of energy which can synthesise them. 'One can . . . prove that in the exchanged objects . . . there is a property which forces the gifts to circulate, to be given and returned.'[3] But this is where the difficulty comes in. Does this property exist objectively, like a physical property of the exchanged goods? Obviously not. That would in any case be impossible, since the goods in question are not only physical objects, but also dignities, responsibilities, privileges – whose sociological role is nonetheless the same as that of material goods. So this property must be conceived in subjective terms. But then we find ourselves faced with an alternative: either the property is nothing other than the act of exchange itself as represented in indigenous thinking, in which case we are going round in a circle, or else it is a power of a different nature, in which case





the act of exchange becomes, in relation to this power, a secondary phenomenon.

The only way to avoid the dilemma would have been to perceive that the primary, fundamental phenomenon is exchange itself, which gets split up into discrete operations in social life; the mistake was to take the discrete operations for the basic phenomenon. Here as elsewhere – but here above all – it was necessary to apply a precept Mauss himself had already formulated in the *Essai sur la magie*: 'The unity of the whole is even more real than each of the parts.'[4] But instead, in the *Essai sur le don*, Mauss strives to reconstruct a whole out of parts; and as that is manifestly not possible, he has to add to the mixture an additional quantity which gives him the illusion of squaring his account. This quantity is *hau*.

Are we not dealing with a mystification, an effect quite often produced in the minds of ethnographers by indigenous people? Not, of course, by 'indigenous people' in general, since no such beings exist, but by a given indigenous group, about whom specialists have already pondered problems, asked questions and attempted answers. In the case in point, instead of applying his principles consistently from start to finish, Mauss discards them in favour of a New Zealand theory – one which is immensely valuable as an ethnological document; yet it is

nothing other than a theory. The fact that Maori sages were the first people to pose certain problems and to resolve them in an infinitely interesting but strikingly unsatisfactory manner does not oblige us to bow to their interpretation. *Hau* is not the ultimate explanation for exchange; it is the conscious form whereby men of a given society, in which the problem had particular importance, apprehended an unconscious necessity whose explanation lies elsewhere.

We may infer that Mauss is seized by hesitation and scruples at the most crucial moment. He is no longer quite sure whether he must draw a picture of indigenous theory, or construct a theory of indigenous reality. He is very largely right to be unsure, for indigenous theory is much more directly related to indigenous reality than a theory developed from our own categories or problems would be. So it was a very great progress, at the time when Mauss was writing, to approach an ethnographic problem from the starting-point of his New Zealand or Melanesian theory, rather than to call upon Western notions such as animism, myth or participation. But indigenous or Western, theory is only ever a theory. At best, it offers us a path of access; for, whether they be Fuegians or Australian Aboriginals, the interested parties' beliefs are always far removed from what they actually think or do. Once the indigenous conception has been isolat-





ed, it must be reduced by an objective critique so as to reach the underlying reality. We have very little chance of finding that reality in conscious formulations; a better chance, in unconscious mental structures to which institutions give us access, but a better chance yet, in language. *Hau* is a product of indigenous reflection; but reality is more conspicuous in certain linguistic features which Mauss does not fail to note, although he does not make as much of them as he should. 'Papuan and Melanesian,' he notes, 'have only one word to designate buying and selling, lending and borrowing. Antithetical operations are expressed by the same word.'[5] That is ample proof that the operations in question are far from 'antithetical'; that they are just two modes of a selfsame reality. We do not need *hau* to make the synthesis, because the antithesis does not exist. The antithesis is a subjective illusion of ethnographers, and sometimes also of indigenous people who, when reasoning about themselves – as they quite often do – behave like ethnographers, or more precisely, like sociologists; that is, as colleagues with whom one may freely confer.

When I endeavour to reconstruct Mauss's thinking in this way, without recourse to magical or affective notions (whose use by Mauss seems to me to be merely residual), some may reproach me for drawing him too far in a rationalist direction. My reply to such a reproach is that

Mauss took upon himself, from the very start of his career, in the *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*, this same effort to understand social life as a system of relations, which is the life-blood of the *Essai sur le don*. It is not I, it is he who asserts the necessity for understanding the magical act as a mode of thinking. He is the one who introduces into ethnographic criticism a fundamental distinction between analytic thinking and synthetic thinking, a distinction whose philosophical origin is in the theory of mathematical notions. Mauss was only able to conceive the problem of thinking in the terms of classical logic. Certain notions take the place of the copula in his argumentation; he says it in so many words: '*Mana* . . . plays the role of the copula in a proposition.'[6] If he had been able to formulate the problem of thinking, instead, in terms of relational logic, am I not justified in saying that the very function of the copula would have been undone, and with it, the notions to which he attributes this function – namely, *mana* in his theory of magic, and *hau* in his theory of the gift?

After a gap of twenty years, the argument of the *Essai sur le don* reproduces that of the *Théorie de la magie*: or at least, the opening part of it does. That alone would justify including in this volume a work whose early date (1902) must be borne in mind in order not to judge it unfairly. Compara-





tive ethnology was eventually to renounce, largely at Mauss's own instigation, what he in *Le Don* called 'that constant comparison which mixes everything up together and makes institutions lose all their local colour and documents their savour.'[7] But that had not yet been given up, at the time of *La Magie*. Only later was Mauss to apply himself to focussing our attention on societies 'which really represent maxima, excesses, which can better show the facts than in societies where, although no less essential, they are still tiny and involuted.' But the *Esquisse* is exceptionally valuable for understanding the history of his thinking and isolating some of its constants. And that is true, not only for the grasp of Mauss's thinking, but for an appreciation of the French sociological school, and of the exact relationship between Mauss's thought and the thought of Durkheim. Analysing the notions of *mana*, *wakan* and *orenda*, building on that foundation an overall interpretation of magic, and so making contact with what he regards as fundamental categories of the human mind, Mauss anticipates by ten years the organisation and some of the conclusions of *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912).[8] The *Esquisse* thus shows the importance of Mauss's contribution to Durkheim's thinking; it enables us to reconstitute something of that close collaboration between uncle and nephew, which was

not limited to the ethnographic field; for we know, in a different context, the essential role that Mauss played in the preparation of *Le Suicide* (1897).[9]

But what interests us most, here, is the logical structure of the work. It is entirely grounded in the notion of *mana*, and we know that a lot of water has flowed under that bridge since then. To keep up with the current, it would be necessary to add to the *Esquisse* the most recent results obtained in the field as well as those derived from linguistic analysis.[10] It would also be necessary to complete the different types of *mana* by introducing into that already vast, and not very harmonious, family the notion very common among the indigenous South Americans of a sort of substantial and usually negative *mana*: a fluid that the shaman controls, which can cover objects in an observable form, which provokes displacements and levitations, and which is generally considered harmful in its effects. Instances are the *tsaruma* of the Jivaro; *nandé*, a Nambikwara representation which I have myself studied;[11] and all the analogous forms reported among the Amniapâ, the Apapocuva, the Apinayé, the Galibi, the Chiquito, the Lamisto, the Chamicuro, the Xebero, the Yameo, the Iquito and others.[12] What would be left of the notion of *mana* after such a reformulation? It is hard to say; in any event, it





would emerge *profaned*. Not that Mauss and Durkheim were wrong, as is sometimes claimed, to bring notions together from far-flung parts of the world, and to constitute them as a category. Even if history confirms the findings of linguistic analysis, and the Polynesian *term* 'mana' is a distant derivative of an Indonesian term defining the efficacy of personal gods, it would by no means follow that the *notion* connoted by that term in Melanesia and Polynesia was a residue or a vestige of a more highly elaborated form of religious thinking. Despite all the local differences, it seems quite certain that *mana*, *wakan*, *orenda* do represent explanations of the same type; so it is legitimate to construct the type, seek to classify it, and analyse it.

The trouble with the traditional position regarding *mana* seems to me to be of a different kind. Contrary to what was believed in 1902, conceptions of the *mana* type are so frequent and so widespread that it is appropriate to wonder whether we are not dealing with a universal and permanent form of thought, which, far from characterising certain civilisations, or archaic or semi-archaic so-called 'stages' in the evolution of the human mind, might be a function of a certain way that the mind situates itself in the presence of things, which must therefore make an appearance whenever that mental situation is given. In

the *Esquisse*, Mauss cites a most profound remark of Father Thavenet about the Algonquian notion of *manitou*:

> It more particularly designates any being which does not yet have a common name, which is unfamiliar; of a salamander, a woman said she was afraid: it was a *manitou*; people laughed at her, telling her the name salamander. Trade beads are *manitou*'s scales, and cloth, that wonderful thing, is the skin of a *manitou*.[13]

Likewise, the first group of semi-civilised Tupi-Kawahib Indians, with whose help we were to reach an unknown village of the tribe in 1938, admired the lengths of red flannel we presented to them and exclaimed: 'O que é este bicho vermelho?' ('What is this red animal?'), which was neither evidence of primitive animism, nor the translation of an indigenous notion, but merely an idiomatic expression of the *falar cabóclo*, the rustic Portuguese of the interior of Brazil. But, inversely, the Nambikwara, who had never seen oxen before 1915, designate them as they have always designated stars, by the name of *atásu*, whose connotation is very close to the Algonquian *manitou*.[14]

These assimilations are not so extraordinary; we do the same type of assimilating, doubtless more guardedly, when we qualify an unknown





object, or one whose function is unclear, or whose effectiveness amazes us, by the French terms *truc* or *machin*. Behind *machin* is machine, and, further back, the idea of force or power. As for *truc*, the etymologists derive it from a medieval term which signifies the lucky move in games of skill or games of chance, that is, one of the precise meanings given to the Indonesian term in which some see the origin of the word *mana*.[15] Of course, we do not say of an object that it *has* these qualities of *truc* or *machin*; but we do say of a person that he or she 'has something'; and when American slang says that a woman has got 'oomph', it is not certain, if we call to mind the sacred and taboo-laden atmosphere which permeates sexual life, in America even more than elsewhere, that we are very far removed from the meaning of *mana*. The difference comes not so much from the notions themselves, such as the human mind everywhere unconsciously works these out, as from the fact that, in our society, these notions have a fluid, spontaneous character, whereas elsewhere they serve as the ground of considered, official interpretative systems; a role, that is to say, which we ourselves reserve for science. But always and everywhere, those types of notions, somewhat like algebraic symbols, occur to represent an indeterminate value of signification, in itself devoid of meaning and thus susceptible of receiving any meaning at all; their

sole function is to fill a gap between the signifier and the signified, or, more exactly, to signal the fact that in such a circumstance, on such an occasion, or in such a one of their manifestations, a relationship of non-equivalence[16] becomes established between signifier and signified, to the detriment of the prior complementary relationship.

So we set ourselves on a path closely parallel to that of Mauss when he invoked the notion of *mana* as grounding certain *a priori* synthetic judgments. But we shall not go along with him when he proceeds to seek the origin of the notion of *mana* in an order of realities different from the relationships that it helps to construct: in the order of feelings, of volitions and of beliefs, which, from the viewpoint of sociological explanation, are epiphenomena, or else mysteries; in any case, they are objects extrinsic to the field of investigation. That is, to my mind, the reason why such a rich, penetrating, illuminating inquiry veers off and ends with a disappointing conclusion. *Mana* finally comes down to 'the expression of social sentiments which are formed — sometimes inexorably and universally, sometimes fortuitously – with regard to certain things, chosen for the most part in an arbitrary fashion . . .'.[17] But the notions of sentiment, fated inexorability, the fortuitous and the arbitrary are not scientific notions. They do not shed light on





the phenomena we set out to explain; they are a party to those phenomena. So we can see that in one case, at least, the notion of *mana* does present those characteristics of a secret power, a mysterious force, which Durkheim and Mauss attributed to it: for such is the role it plays in their own system. *Mana* really is *mana* there. But at the same time, one wonders whether their theory of *mana* is anything other than a device for imputing properties to indigenous thought which are implied by the very peculiar place that the idea of *mana* is called on to occupy in their own thinking.

Consequently, the strongest warning should be sounded to those sincere admirers of Mauss who would be tempted to halt at that first stage of his thinking; their gratitude would be not for his lucid analyses so much as for his exceptional talent for rehabilitating certain indigenous theories in their strangeness and their authenticity: for he would never have looked to that contemplation for the idle refuge of a vacillating mind. If we confined ourselves to what is merely a preliminary procedure in the history of Mauss's thinking, we would risk committing sociology to a dangerous path: even a path of destruction, if we then went one step further and reduced social reality to the conception that man – savage man, even – has of it. That conception would furthermore become empty of meaning if its reflexive

character were forgotten. Then ethnography would dissolve into a verbose phenomenology, a falsely naïve mixture in which the apparent obscurities of indigenous thinking would only be brought to the forefront to cover the confusions of the ethnographer, which would otherwise be too obvious.

There is nothing to prevent us from continuing Mauss's thinking in the other direction: the direction which the *Essai sur le don* was to define, after overcoming the equivocation that we noted earlier in reference to *hau*. For, luckily, whereas *mana* comes at the end of the *Esquisse*, *hau* only appears at the beginning of the *Essai sur le don*, and it is treated throughout as a point of departure, and not a goal. If we were to project the conception of exchange, which Mauss there invites us to formulate, back on to the notion of *mana*, where would it take us? It has to be admitted that, like *hau*, *mana* is no more than the subjective reflection of the need to supply an unperceived totality. Exchange is not a complex edifice built on the obligations of giving, receiving and returning, with the help of some emotional-mystical cement. It is a synthesis immediately given to, and given by, symbolic thought, which, in exchange as in any other form of communication, surmounts the contradiction inherent in it; that is the contradiction of perceiving things as elements of dialogue, in respect of self and others





simultaneously, and destined by nature to pass from the one to the other. The fact that those things may be *the one's* or *the other's* represents a situation which is derivative from the initial relational aspect. But does not the same apply in the case of magic? Magical reasoning, implied in the action of producing smoke to elicit clouds and rain, is not grounded in a primordial distinction between smoke and cloud, with an appeal to *mana* to weld the one to the other, but in the fact that a deeper level of thinking identifies smoke with cloud; that the one is, at least in a certain respect, the same thing as the other: that identification is what justifies the subsequent association, and not the other way round. All magical operations rest on the restoring of a unity; not a lost unity (for nothing is ever lost) but an unconscious one, or one which is less completely conscious than those operations themselves. The notion of *mana* does not belong to the order of the real, but to the order of thinking, which, even when it thinks itself, only ever thinks an object.

It is in that relational aspect of symbolic thinking that we can look for the answer to our problem. Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance in the ascent of animal life, language can only have arisen all at once. Things cannot have begun to signify gradually. In the wake of a transformation which is not a subject of study for the social

sciences, but for biology and psychology, a shift occurred from a stage when nothing had a meaning to another stage when everything had meaning. Actually, that apparently banal remark is important, because that radical change has no counterpart in the field of knowledge, which develops slowly and progressively. In other words, at the moment when the entire universe all at once became *significant*, it was none the better *known* for being so, even if it is true that the emergence of language must have hastened the rhythm of the development of knowledge. So there is a fundamental opposition, in the history of the human mind, between symbolism, which is characteristically discontinuous, and knowledge, characterised by continuity. Let us consider what follows from that. It follows that the two categories of the signifier and the signified came to be constituted simultaneously and interdependently, as complementary units; whereas knowledge, that is, the intellectual process which enables us to identify certain aspects of the signifier and certain aspects of the signified, one by reference to the other – we could even say the process which enables us to choose, from the entirety of the signifier and from the entirety of the signified, those parts which present the most satisfying relations of mutual agreement – only got started very slowly. It is as if humankind had suddenly acquired an immense domain and the





detailed plan of that domain, along with a notion of the reciprocal relationship of domain and plan; but had spent millennia learning which specific symbols of the plan represented the different aspects of the domain. The universe signified long before people began to know what it signified; no doubt that goes without saying. But, from the foregoing analysis, it also emerges that from the beginning, the universe signified the totality of what humankind can expect to know about it. What people call the progress of the human mind and, in any case, the progress of scientific knowledge, could only have been and can only ever be constituted out of processes of correcting and recutting of patterns, regrouping, defining relationships of belonging and discovering new resources, inside a totality which is closed and complementary to itself.

We appear to be far removed from *mana*, but in reality we are extremely close to it. For, although the human race has always possessed an enormous mass of positive knowledge, and although the different societies have devoted more or less effort to maintaining and developing it, it is nonetheless in very recent times that scientific thinking became established as authority and that forms of societies emerged in which the intellectual and moral ideal, at the same time as the practical ends pursued by the social body, became organised around scientific knowledge,

elected as the centre of reference in an official and deliberate way. The difference is one of degree, not of nature, but it does exist. We can therefore expect the relationship between symbolism and knowledge to conserve common features in the non-industrial societies and in our own, although those features would not be equally pronounced in the two types of society. It does not mean that we are creating a gulf between them, if we acknowledge that the work of equalising of the signifier to fit the signified has been pursued more methodically and rigorously from the time when modern science was born, and within the boundaries of the spread of science. But everywhere else, and still constantly in our own societies (and no doubt for a long time to come), a fundamental situation perseveres which arises out of the human condition: namely, that man has from the start had at his disposition a signifier-totality which he is at a loss to know how to allocate to a signified, given as such, but no less unknown for being given. There is always a non-equivalence or 'inadequation' between the two, a non-fit and overspill which divine understanding alone can soak up; this generates a signifier-surfeit relative to the signifieds to which it can be fitted. So, in man's effort to understand the world, he always disposes of a surplus of signification (which he shares out among things in accordance with the laws of the symbolic thinking which it is the task





of ethnologists and linguists to study). That distribution of a supplementary ration – if I can express myself thus – is absolutely necessary to ensure that, in total, the available signifier and the mapped-out signified may remain in the relationship of complementarity which is the very condition of the exercise of symbolic thinking.

I believe that notions of the *mana* type, however diverse they may be, and viewed in terms of their most general function (which, as we have seen, has not vanished from our mentality and our form of society) represent nothing more or less than that *floating signifier* which is the disability of all finite thought (but also the surety of all art, all poetry, every mythic and aesthetic invention), even though scientific knowledge is capable, if not of staunching it, at least of controlling it partially. Moreover, magical thinking offers other, different methods of channelling and containment, with different results, and all these methods can very well coexist. In other words, accepting the inspiration of Mauss's precept that all social phenomena can be assimilated to language, I see in *mana*, *wakan*, *orenda*, and other notions of the same type, the conscious expression of a *semantic function*, whose role is to enable symbolic thinking to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it. That explains the apparently insoluble antinomies attaching to the

notion of *mana*, which struck ethnographers so forcibly, and on which Mauss shed light: force and action; quality and state; substantive, adjective and verb all at once; abstract and concrete; omnipresent and localised. And, indeed, *mana* is all those things together; but is that not precisely because it is none of those things, but a simple form, or to be more accurate, a symbol in its pure state, therefore liable to take on any symbolic content whatever? In the system of symbols which makes up any cosmology, it would just be a *zero symbolic value*, that is, a sign marking the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content over and above that which the signified already contains, which can be any value at all, provided it is still part of the available reserve, and is not already, as the phonologists say, a term in a set.[18]

That conception seems to me to be rigorously faithful to Mauss's thinking. In fact, it is nothing other than Mauss's conception, translated from its original expression in terms of class logic into the terms of a symbolic logic which summarises the most general laws of language. The translation is not of my making, nor is it the result of my taking liberties with the initial conception. It merely reflects an objective evolution which has occurred in the psychological and social sciences in the course of the last thirty years; the value of Mauss's teaching lay in its being a first manifestation of that evolution, and in having contributed greatly to it. Mauss was, indeed, one of the very first to expose the insufficiency of traditional psychology and logic, and to break open their rigid frameworks, revealing different forms of thought, seemingly 'alien to our adult European minds'.[19] At the time when he was writing (remember that the essay on magic dates from a time when Freud's ideas were completely unknown in France) that discovery could scarcely have been expressed otherwise than negatively, through a call for a 'non-intellectualist psychology'. But no one would have had more cause than Mauss to rejoice in the fact that that psychology eventually became formulatable as a *differently* intellectualist psychology, the generalised expression of the laws of human thought, of which the individual manifestations, in different sociological contexts, are simply the various modes. He would have been glad, first, because it was the *Essai sur le don* which was to define the method for that task, and, above all, because Mauss himself had assigned to ethnology the essential goal of contributing to the enlargement of the scope of human reason. So, for the cause of reason, he claimed in advance all the discoveries that could yet be made, in those obscure zones where mental forms, not easily accessible because buried both at once at the farthest limits of the universe and in the most secret recesses of our minds, are often perceived only as refracted in a

cloudy halo of emotion. It is evident that Mauss was obsessed throughout his life by Comte's precept, which appears and reappears constantly in the essays collected in this volume; that is the precept that psychological life can only acquire a meaning on two levels: that of the social, which is language; or that of the physiological, which is, for living things, the other form, the mute form of necessity.[20] Never was he truer to his underlying thinking, never did he map the ethnologist's mission as astronomer of the human constellations better than in that formulation which draws together the method, the means and the ultimate goal of our sciences; a formulation which any institute of ethnology could inscribe over its portal:

> We must, before all else, compile as large as possible a catalogue of categories; we must begin with all those which we can know that mankind has used. Then it will be seen that in the firmament of reason there have been, and there still are, many moons that are dead, or pale, or obscure.[21]



# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1 C. Lévi-Strauss, 'French sociology', in *Twentieth Century Sociology*, 1945.

2 This *Introduction* prefaced Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1950, which grouped the following studies by Mauss: *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*; *Essai sur le don*; *Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie*; *Effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort suggérée par la collectivité*; *Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de 'moi'*; and *Les Techniques du corps*. In the present essay and notes, abbreviated forms of some of these titles are at times used, for example: *Esquisse* or *La Magie*; *Essai* or *Le Don*; *Psychologie et sociologie*; *La Notion de personne*; and *L'Idée de mort*. [Translator's note.]

## I

1 W. B. Cannon, '"Voodoo" death', 1942.
2 M. Mauss, *Les Techniques du corps*, in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1950, p. 366 (*Body Techniques*, 1979, p. 99).
3 *Les Techniques du corps*, p. 375 (*Body Techniques*, p. 108).
4 *Ibid.*, p. 375 (p. 108).
5 *Ibid.*, p. 377 (p. 111).
6 *Ibid.*, p. 381 (p. 115).
7 *Ibid.*, p. 377 (p. 111).
8 R. F. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1935.
9 For this aspect of Mauss's thinking, the reader would do well to refer to two other articles not included in this volume [*Sociologie et anthropologie*]: 'Salutations par les rires et les larmes' and 'L'Expression obligatoire des sentiments' (1921a). See Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 1969–75, 3, pp. 269–78 and 278–9, for 'L'Expression obligatoire des sentiments' and for Mauss's reply to the article by G. Dumas (1920).
10 M. Mead, 'The Mountain Arapesh', in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 41, part 3, 1949, p. 388.
11 Mauss, *La Magie*, in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, p. 20 (*A General Theory of Magic*, 1972, p. 28).
12 C. Lévi-Strauss, 'Le Sorcier et sa magie', 1949.
13 That seems to me to be the conclusion that emerges from Dr J. Lacan's profound study, 'L'Agressivité en psychanalyse', 1948 ('Aggressivity in psychoanalysis', 1977).





14 M. Leiris, 'Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haïti', 1950: see pp. 1352–4.
15 S. F. Nadel, 'A study of shamanism in the Nuba Mountains', 1946, p. 36.

## II

1 *La Notion de personne* should be read in conjunction with *L'âme, le nom et la personne* (1929c), which completes it.
2 See bibliography for the aforementioned articles by Mauss.
3 Mauss, *Essai sur le don*, in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, p. 276 (*The Gift*, 1954, p. 78).
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ibid.*
6 *Ibid.*
7 Mauss, *La Magie*, p. 109 (*Magic*, p. 116).
8 *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2 (p. 79).
9 G. Davy, *La Foi jurée* (1922).
10 B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922. On this point, see Malinowski's note in *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, 1926, p. 41, note 57.
11 R. Firth, *We, the Tikopia*, 1936, ch. 15; *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, 1939, p. 323.
12 N. S. Trubeckoj (also spelled Trubetskoi, Troubetzkoy, etc.), *Grundzüge der Phonologie*, 1939; and articles by R. Jakobson included in the Appendix of the French translation, *Principes de phonologie*, 1949. For reference to the English translations of these writings, see bibliographical

entries under R. Jakobson, 1930, 1936, 1939; and N. S. Trubeckoj, 1939.

13 N. Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 1948; C. E. Shannon and W. Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 1949.

## III

1 Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620) describes aphoristically the method of universalisation of knowledge; its principles of investigation gave impetus to experimental science. [Translator's note.]

2 Mauss, *Essai sur le don*, p. 205 (*The Gift*, p. 37).

3 *Ibid.*, p. 214 (p. 41).

4 Mauss, *La Magie*, p. 81 (*Magic*, p. 88).

5 *Le Don*, p. 193 (*The Gift*, pp. 30–1). Mauss is here quoting J. H. Holmes, *In Primitive New Guinea*, 1924.

6 *La Magie*, p. 116 (*Magic*, p. 122).

7 *Le Don*, p. 149 (*The Gift*, p. 3).

8 E. Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1912.

9 E. Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, 1897.

10 A. M. Hocart, 'Mana', 1914; 'Mana again', 1922; 'Natural and supernatural', 1932. H. I. Hogbin, 'Mana', 1935–6. A. Capell, 'The word "mana": a linguistic study', 1938. R. Firth, 'The analysis of mana: an empirical approach', 1940; 'An analysis of mana', 1941. G. Blake-Palmer, 'Mana, some Christian and Moslem parallels', 1946. G. J. Schneep, 'El concepto de mana', 1947. B.





Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 1948.

11 C. Lévi-Strauss, 'La Vie familiale et sociale des Indiens Nambikwara' (1948b).

12 A. Métraux, 'La causa y el tratamiento mágico de las enfermedades entre los indios de la Región Tropical Sud-Americana' (1944a); 'Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale' (1944b).

13 Mauss, *La Magie*, p. 108 (*Magic*, p. 114). [Mauss is here quoting Father Thavenet out of E. Teza, *Intorno agli studi del Thavenet sulla lingua algonchina: osservazioni*, 1880. The reference is given inaccurately by Mauss as 'Tesa, *Studi del Thavenet*, 1881', and reproduced in the same form in the 1972 English translation – Translator's note.]

14 C. Lévi-Strauss, 'La Vie familiale . . .' (1948b), pp. 98–9; 'The Tupi-Kawahib' (1948a), pp. 299–305.

To be compared with the Dakota, who say of the first horse, brought, according to myth, by lightning: 'He smelled differently from a human being. They thought it might be a dog, only he was bigger than a pack-dog, so they named him *šúnka wakhán*, "Mysterious Dog"' (M. W. Beckwith, 'Mythology of the Oglala Dakota', 1930, p. 379).

15 On the derivation of the word *mana*, cf. A. Capell (1938).

16 For clarity, I have used *non-equivalence* instead of *inadequation* (the French term being *inadéquation*), which is obsolete. Seventeenth-century examples cited in *O.E.D.* refer to the 'inadequation to the truth' of man's knowledge of

his inner states, and to 'difference arising . . . from the inadequation of languages'; both of these are clearly precursors of the *inadequation of signifier and signified* proposed in this passage. [Translator's note.]

17 Mauss, *La Magie*, p. 115 (*Magic*, p. 121). Decisive though Mauss's procedure was, when he assimilated social phenomena to language, it was to give sociological thinking some trouble in one respect. Ideas like the ones expressed in the passage quoted could, in fact, get support from what was for a long time to be considered the impregnable rampart of Saussurean linguistics: that is, the theory of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. But today, there is no position that we more urgently need to put behind us.

18 Linguists have already been led to formulate hypotheses of this type. For instance:

> A zero-phoneme . . . is opposed to all other French phonemes by the absence both of distinctive features and of a constant sound characteristic. On the other hand, the zero-phoneme . . . is opposed to the absence of any phoneme whatsoever. (R. Jakobson and J. Lotz, 'Notes on the French phonemic pattern', 1949, p. 155)

19 Mauss, *La Magie*, p. 100 (*Magic*, p. 107).

20 Auguste Comte (1798–1857), founder of Positivist philosophy, a system confined to recognition of facts, observable phenomena and their objective relations. His *Cours de philosophie* (1830–42) is





famous for its classification of the sciences and its history of social evolution. [Translator's note.]

21 Mauss, *Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie*, in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1950, p. 309 ('Real and practical relations . . .', *Sociology and Psychology*, 1979a, p. 32).

# Bibliography


Beckwith, M. W. (1930), 'Mythology of the Oglala Dakota', *Journal of American Folklore*, New York, 43, pp. 339–442.

Benedict, R. F. (1935), *Patterns of Culture: An Anthropological Study of the Zuñi, Dobu and Kwakiutl Tribes*, London, G. Routledge & Sons. Republished by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1961.

Blake-Palmer, G. (1946), 'Mana, some Christian and Moslem parallels', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Wellington, 55, pp. 263–75.

Cannon, W. B. (1942), '"Voodoo" death', *American Anthropologist*, Menasha, Wisconsin, n.s. 44, pp. 169–81.

Capell, A. (1938), 'The word "mana": a linguistic study', *Oceania*, Sydney, 9, pp. 89–96.

Davy, G. (1922), *La Foi jurée. Etude sociologique du problème du contrat. La formation du lien contractuel*, Paris.

Dumas, G. (1920), 'Salutations par les rires et les







larmes', *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, 18. Extract from G. Dumas, *Traité de psychologie*, Paris, 1923.

Durkheim, E. (1897), *Le Suicide. Etude de sociologie*, Paris, Alcan. (English translation by J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson, *Suicide. A Study in Sociology*, edited with an introduction by G. Simpson, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952.)

Durkheim, E. (1912), *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*, Paris, Alcan. (English translation by J. W. Swain, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1915.)

Durkheim, E. and Mauss, M. (1903), 'De Quelques formes primitives de classification. Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives', *Année sociologique*, 1901–2, 6, pp. 1–72. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, pp. 13–89. (English translation and introduction by R. Needham, *Primitive Classification*, London, Cohen & West, 1963; second edn 1969, reprinted as a Routledge paperback, 1970.)

Firth, R. (1936), *We, the Tikopia. A Sociological Study of Kinship in Primitive Polynesia*, London, George Allen & Unwin.

Firth, R. (1939), *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, London, G. Routledge & Sons.

Firth, R. (1940), 'The analysis of mana: an empirical approach', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Wellington, 49, pp. 483–510. Republished in *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1967, pp. 174–94, with commentary, pp. 362–6.

Firth, R. (1941), 'An analysis of mana', *Polynesian*

*Anthropological Studies*, Wellington, pp. 198–218.
Hocart, A. M. (1914), 'Mana', *Man*, London, 1914, no. 46, pp. 97–101.
Hocart, A. M. (1922), 'Mana again', *Man*, London, September 1922, no. 79, pp. 139–41.
Hocart, A. M. (1932), 'Natural and supernatural', *Man*, London, March 1932, no. 78, pp. 59–61.
Hogbin, H. I. (1935–6), 'Mana', *Oceania*, Sydney, 6, pp. 241–74.
Holmes, J. H. (1924), *In Primitive New Guinea*, London, Seeley, Service & Co.
Jakobson, R. (1930), 'Principes de phonologie historique': présenté à la Réunion phonologique internationale à Prague, 20 décembre 1930. Published in German in the *Travaux du cercle linguistique de Prague*, 4, 1931; revised for French edition in Appendix of N. S. Trubeckoj (Troubetzkoy), *Principes de phonologie*; republished in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, 1, *Phonological Studies*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1962, pp. 202–20.
Jakobson, R. (1936), 'Sur la théorie des affinités phonologiques entre les langues': rapport au Quatrième Congrès international de linguistes, Copenhague, août 1936, publié dans les Actes du Congrès, 1938. Revised for publication in Appendix of N. S. Trubeckoj, *Principes de phonologie*; republished in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, 1, *Phonological Studies*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1962, pp. 234–46.
Jakobson, R. (1939), 'Les Lois phoniques du langage enfantin': communication préparée pour le





Cinquième Congrès international de linguistes convoqué à Bruxelles, septembre 1939. Published in Appendix of N. S. Trubeckoj, *Principes de phonologie*; republished in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, 1, *Phonological Studies*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1962, pp. 317–27.
Jakobson, R. and Lotz, J. (1949), 'Notes on the French phonemic pattern', *Word*, New York, 5, no. 2, August 1949. Republished in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, 1, *Phonological Studies*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1962, pp. 426–34.
Lacan, J. (1948), 'L'Agressivité en psychanalyse', *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 3, July-September 1948. Republished in J. Lacan, *Ecrits*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 101–24. (English translation by A. Sheridan, 'Aggressivity in psychoanalysis', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1977, pp. 8–30.)
Leiris, M. (1950), 'Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haïti', *Les Temps modernes*, Paris, 5, pp. 1345–68.
Lévi-Strauss, C. (1945), 'French sociology', *Twentieth Century Sociology*, edited by G. Gurvitch and W. E. Moore, New York, ch. 17 (French translation in *La Sociologie au vingtième siècle*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1947, vol. 2).
Lévi-Strauss, C. (1948a), 'The Tupi-Kawahib', *Handbook of South American Indians*, Washington, 3, pp. 299–305.
Lévi-Strauss, C. (1948b), 'La Vie familiale et sociale des Indiens Nambikwara', *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, Paris, n.s. 37, pp. 1–131.
Lévi-Strauss, C. (1949), 'Le Sorcier et sa magie', *Les*

*Temps modernes*, 4, pp. 385–406.
Malinowski, B. (1922), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific. An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*, with a preface by J. G. Frazer, Studies in Economics and Political Science, 65, London, Routledge, 1922. Republished by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978.
Malinowski, B. (1926), *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, London, Kegan Paul & Co.
Malinowski, B. (1948), *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*, New York, The Free Press. Republished by Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1954; Souvenir Press, London, 1974.
Mauss, M. (1902–3), 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie', en collaboration avec H. Hubert, *Année sociologique*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France. Republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. 1–141. (English translation by R. Brain, *A General Theory of Magic*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.)
Mauss, M. (1904–5), 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimo. Etude de morphologie sociale', avec la collaboration partielle de H. Beuchat, *Année sociologique*, 9, pp. 39–132. Republished in second and third editions of M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1966 and 1973, pp. 389–475. (English translation by J. J. Fox, *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo. A Study in Social Morphology*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.)
Mauss, M. (1909), 'L'Art et le mythe d'après M. Wundt',





*Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, Paris, 33e année, 66, July–December 1908, pp. 48–78.
Mauss, M. (1911), 'Anna-Virâj', *Mélanges d'indianisme offerts par ses élèves à M. Sylvain Lévy*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, pp. 333–41. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, pp. 593–600.
Mauss, M. (1914a), 'Les Origines de la notion de monnaie', communication faite à l'Institut Français d'Anthropologie; publiée dans les comptes rendus des séances, 2, tome 1, Supplément à l'*Anthropologie*, Paris, 25. This text is republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, in the section *Valeur magique et valeur d'échange*, pp. 106–20, which includes further discussions from *Anthropologie*, 25, with reference to the religion and magic of the Ewhe.
Mauss, M. (1914b), 'Dieux Ewhe de la monnaie et du change'. See preceding entry.
Mauss, M. (1921a), 'L'Expression obligatoire des sentiments (rituels oraux funéraires australiens)', *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Paris, 18, pp. 425–34. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 269–78.
Mauss, M. (1921b), 'Une Forme archaïque de contrat chez les Thraces', *Revue des études grecques*, Paris, 34, pp. 388–97. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 35–43.
Mauss, M. (1923–4), 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *Année sociologique*, Paris, 2e série, 1, pp. 30–186. Republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. 143–279. (English translation by I. Cunnison, *The Gift*, London, Cohen & West, 1954.)

Mauss, M. (1924a), 'Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie': communication présentée le 10 janvier 1924 à la Société de Psychologie, *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Paris, 21, pp. 892–922. Republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. 281–310. (English translation by B. Brewster, 'Real and practical relations between psychology and sociology', in M. Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, pp. 1–33.)

Mauss, M. (1924b), 'Gift, gift', *Mélanges offerts à Charles Andler par ses amis et ses élèves*, Strasbourg, Istria, pp. 243–7. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 46–51.

Mauss, M. (1925), 'Commentaires sur un texte de Posidonius. Le suicide, contre-prestation suprême', *Revue celtique*, Paris, 42, pp. 324–9. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 52–7.

Mauss, M. (1926a), 'Effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort suggérée par la collectivité (Australie, Nouvelle-Zélande)': communication présentée à la Société de Psychologie, *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Paris, 23, pp. 653–69. Republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. 311–30. (English translation by B. Brewster, 'The physical effect on the individual of the idea of death suggested by the collectivity', in M. Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, pp. 35–56.)

Mauss, M. (1926b), 'Parentés à plaisanteries': communication présentée à l'Institut Français d'Anthropologie, 1926; *Annuaire de l'Ecole pratique des hautes études*, section des sciences religieuses,





Paris, 1928. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 109–24.

Mauss, M. (1928), 'Wette, wedding', *Procès-verbaux de la Société d'Histoire du droit*.

Mauss, M. (1929a), 'Biens masculins et féminins en droit celtique', *Procès-verbaux des Journées d'Histoire du droit*.

Mauss, M. (1929b), 'Les Civilisations: éléments et formes', exposé présenté à la Première Semaine Internationale de Synthèse: *Civilisation. Le mot et l'idée*, Paris, La Renaissance du livre, 2e fascicule, 1930, pp. 81–108. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, pp. 456–87.

Mauss, M. (1929c), 'L'âme, le nom et la personne', intervention à la suite d'une communication de L. Lévy-Bruhl, 'L'âme primitive', *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, 29, pp. 124–7. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, pp. 131–5.

Mauss, M. (1934), 'Fragment d'un plan de sociologie générale descriptive. Classification et méthode d'observation des phénomènes généraux de la vie sociale dans les sociétes de type archaïque (phénomènes spécifiques de la vie intérieure de la société)', *Annales sociologiques*, série A, fascicule 1, pp. 1–56. Republished in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 3, pp. 303–54.

Mauss, M. (1936), 'Les Techniques du corps': communication présentée à la Société de Psychologie le 17 mai 1934, *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Paris, 32, nos 3–4, pp. 271–93. Republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. 363–86. (English translation by B.

Brewster, 'Body techniques', in M. Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, pp. 95–123.)

Mauss, M. (1938), 'Une Catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de "moi"': Huxley Memorial Lecture, 1938, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, London, pp. 263–362. (English translation by B. Brewster, 'A category of the human mind: the notion of person, the notion of "self"', in M. Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, pp. 57–94.)

Mauss, M. (1950), *Sociologie et anthropologie*, précédé d'une *Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss* par C. Lévi-Strauss, Paris, Presses universitaires de France. This volume contains 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie'; 'Essai sur le don'; 'Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie'; 'Effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort suggérée par la collectivité'; 'Une Catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de "moi"'; 'Les Techniques du corps'. The second edition, 1966, and third edition, 1973, contain, in addition to the above, the 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimo'. (For English translations, see entries for individual essays, and also M. Mauss, 1954, 1972, 1979a, 1979b.)

Mauss, M. (1954), *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by I. Cunnison, with an introduction by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, London, Cohen & West.

Mauss, M. (1969–75), *Oeuvres*, présentées par V. Karady, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 3 vols. This edition contains a great many, but not all, of the





writings of Mauss not included in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, and a quite extensive bibliography, vol. 3, pp. 641–92.

Mauss, M. (1972), *A General Theory of Magic*, translated by R. Brain, with a foreword by D. F. Pocock, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mauss, M. (1979a), *Sociology and Psychology*, translated by B. Brewster, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul. Contains 'Real and practical relations between psychology and sociology'; 'The physical effect on the individual of the idea of death suggested by the collectivity'; 'A category of the human mind: the notion of person, the notion of "self"'; 'Body techniques'.

Mauss, M. (1979b), *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo. A Study in Social Morphology*, translated by J. J. Fox, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mead, M. (1939–49), 'The Mountain Arapesh', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, New York, vol. 36, pt 3; vol. 37, pt 3; vol. 40, pt 3; vol. 41, pt 3.

Métraux, A. (1944a), 'La causa y el tratamiento mágico de las enfermedades entre los indios de la Región Tropical Sud-Americana', *America Indigena*, Mexico, 4, no. 2, April 1944, pp. 157–64.

Métraux, A. (1944b), 'Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Sud tropicale' (two parts), *Acta Americana*, Mexico, 2, no. 3, July-September 1944, pp. 197–219; no. 4, October-December 1944, pp. 320–41.

Nadel, S. F. (1946), 'A study of shamanism in the Nuba Mountains', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological*

*Institute*, London, 76, part 1, pp. 25–37.
Schneep, G. J. (1947), 'El concepto de mana', *Acta Anthropologica*, Mexico, 11, no. 3,
Shannon, C. E. and Weaver, W. (1949), *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
Teza, E. (1880), *Intorno agli studi del Thavenet sulla lingua algonchina: osservazioni*, Pisa, Nistri.
Thavenet, Father (1880): see preceding entry.
Trubeckoj, N. S. (1939), *Grundzüge der Phonologie*, Prague. The French translation by J. Cantineau, *Principes de phonologie*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1949 (cited by Lévi-Strauss), contains in Appendix three essays by R. Jakobson; see entries for R. Jakobson, 1930, 1936, 1939. (English translation by C. A. M. Baltaxe, *Principles of Phonology*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969.)
Wiener, N. (1948), *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, New York, John Wiley & Sons; Paris, Hermann et Cie.



# Index

Note: Most references are to Mauss and his writings, unless otherwise indicated.