



# Conversations with Claude Levi-Strauss

*Claude Levi-Strauss, Didier Eribon*

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At the age of eighty, one of the most influential yet reclusive intellectuals of the twentieth century consented to his first interviews in nearly thirty years. Hailed by *Le Figaro* as "an event," the resulting conversations between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon (a correspondent for *Le Nouvel Observateur*) reveal the great anthropologist speaking of his life and work with ease and humor.

Now available in English, the conversations are rich in Lévi-Strauss's candid appraisals of some of the best-known figures of the Parisian intelligentsia: surrealists André Breton and Max Ernst, with whom Lévi-Strauss shared a bohemian life in 1940s Manhattan; de Beauvoir, Sartre, and Camus, the stars of existentialism; Leiris, Foucault, Dumézil, Jacob, Lacan, and others. His long friendships with Jakobson and Merleau-Ponty are recalled, as well as his encounters with prominent figures in American anthropology: Lowie, Boas (who suddenly died in his chair beside Lévi-Strauss at a banquet at Columbia University), Benedict, Linton, Mead, and Kroeber.

Lévi-Strauss speaks frankly about how circumstances and his own inclinations, after his early fieldwork in Brazil, led him to embrace theoretical work. His straightforward answers to Eribon's penetrating questions—What is a myth? What is structuralism? Are you a philosopher?—clarify his intellectual motives and the development of his research; his influential role as an administrator, including the founding of the Laboratory of Social Anthropology and of the journal *L'Homme*; the course of his writings, from *Elementary Structures of Kinship* to *The Jealous Potter*; and his thoughts on the conduct of anthropology today.

Never before has Lévi-Strauss spoken so freely on so many aspects of his life: his initial failure to be elected to the Collège de France; his reaction to the events of May 1968; his regrets at not being a great investigative reporter or playwright; his deep identification with Wagner, Proust, and Rousseau. This is a rare opportunity to become acquainted with a great thinker in all his dimensions.

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