Chapter 2
The Ethnological Paradigm of the 'Primitive'

European ethnology in the decades around 1900 was shaped by the paradigm of the 'primitive.' The 'primitive' did not simply replace the older concept of the 'savage,' nor did it merely refer to an object of study specific to ethnological discourse. Rather, the term distilled a perspective on indigenous cultures specific to colonialist modernity.[1] As Sven Werkmeister shows, at the vanishing point of this perspective was the search for the origin of (European) culture,[2] an endeavor that was a feature of what Michel Foucault calls the "age of history," which had replaced the "age of representation" around 1800.[3] Foucault finds that "in modern thought," looking for an origin situated outside of history, as previous thinking had done, "is no longer conceivable."[4] Rather, the modern awareness of one's own historicity was precisely what now made thinking about origins necessary. The present and the time of humanity's first beginnings were no longer regarded as opposed and separate epochs, with one belonging to history and the other located outside of it. Instead, the past and present now occupied points on a single continuous spectrum and were connected by one developmental process.

The human sciences, which include ethnology, emerged against this backdrop. According to Foucault, their object of study had come into being over time: "Man [...] can be revealed only when bound to a previously existing historicity." His origins appear as both distant and near, foreign and familiar, inaccessible and well known. The 'modern European' is bound to this origin by means of

1 On the prehistory and transformation of the topos around 1850, cf. Sebastian Kaufmann, *Ästhetik des "Wilden": Zur Verschränkung von Ethno-Anthropologie und ästhetischer Theorie 1750–1850. Mit einem Ausblick auf die Debatte über 'primitive' Kunst um 1900* (Basel: Schwabe, 2020), 647–653; Lucas Marco Gisi, "Die Genese des modernen Primitivismus als wissenschaftliche Methode," in *Literarischer Primitivismus*, ed. Nicola Gess (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Bernd Weiler, *Die Ordnung des Fortschritts. Zum Aufstieg und Fall der Fortschrittsidee in der "jungen" Anthropologie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006); and, for a concise summary, Li, "Primitivism and Postcolonial Literature," 984.

2 Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 57–70. Werkmeister refers to Foucault, but above all to Schiller, showing that modern notions about indigenous peoples had already come into effect around 1800. On the transformation of Schiller's dictum, "They are what we were," see Nicola Gess, "Sie sind, was wir waren. Literarische Reflexionen einer biologischen Träumerei von Schiller bis Benn," *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 56 (2012).

3 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 217.

4 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 329.

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a historical development, yet removed from it by the vast temporal abyss of the "already begun": "It is always against a background of the already begun that man is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origin."[5] Thus, the quest for origins proves both affirmative and unsettling inasmuch as it brings into view something foreign while simultaneously constituting the very basis of the self. "The original in man," Foucault writes,

> is that which articulates him from the very outset upon something other than himself; it is that which introduces into his experience contents and forms older than him, which he cannot master. [...] It links him to that which does not have the same time as himself; and it sets free in him everything that is not contemporaneous with him.[6]

From this conception of origins arises a perspective on indigenous peoples specific to colonial modernity: the *paradigm of the 'primitive,'* which underlies the emergence and consolidation of ethnology. Under this paradigm, indigenous peoples do not receive attention as exemplars of a prehistorical condition, as had been the case for the 'savages' of the eighteenth century. Nor are they investigated for their own sake, so that researchers might learn how those societies function (as would occur in later ethnology).

Instead, at the turn of the twentieth century, ethnologists looked to indigenous peoples in order to understand the origins of *their own* culture. In 1898, Leo Frobenius answered the question, "Where does our history begin?" by declaring:

> Those simple, exotic forms of culture represent documents of world history! What historians have bootlessly sought in ancient hieroglyphs and inscriptions, they are able to say. Taken as a whole, they tell the tale, wrapped in the wondrous language of images, of the origin of human culture.[7]

Examining foreign cultures thus served to promote understanding of the development of (European) culture. In this framework, indigenous peoples were, on the one hand, perceived and represented as epitomizing foreignness, the opposite of the image the ethnologists had of themselves and their own culture. The mature, rational, self-disciplined, sociable, and cultivated construct of the European was set against the irrational 'child of nature' dominated by feelings, drives, and potentially antisocial impulses. Indigenous cultures provided a

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5 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 330. Cf. the following quote from Tylor, which leaves open "whatever yet earlier state may in reality have lain behind it" (Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 19).
6 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 331. Also quoted in Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 64.
7 Leo Frobenius, *Der Ursprung der Kultur* (Berlin: Bornträger, 1898), viii – ix.

screen onto which to project everything considered taboo or antithetical to the researcher's own culture.[8] As Fritz Kramer remarks:

> With a view to its "own" culture, nineteenth-century ethnography devised the "upside-down" world of foreigners. [...] As a representation of "alien" culture, it openly expressed the truth taboo in polite society. [...] Therefore I would like to call it *imaginary ethnography.*[9]

Likewise, in *The Invention of Primitive Society*, Adam Kuper stresses the mechanism of projection.

> In the end [...] it may be that something yet more fundamental than political and religious concerns informed the new wave of interest in human origins. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Europeans believed themselves to be witnessing a revolutionary transition in the type of their society. [...] Each conceived of the new world in contrast to "traditional society"; and behind this "traditional society" they discerned a primitive or primeval society. The anthropologists took this primitive society as their special subject, but in practice primitive society proved to be their own society (as they understood it) seen in a distorting mirror. For them modern society was defined above all by the territorial state, the monogamous family and private property. Primitive society therefore must have been nomadic, ordered by blood ties, sexually promiscuous and communist. [...] Primitive man was illogical and given to magic. [...] Modern man, however, had invented science. [...] They looked back in order to understand the nature of the present, on the assumption that modern society had evolved from its antithesis.[10]

On the other hand, the modern focus on origins also means that these antithetical others always already formed part of the researcher's own culture too. The process of historical development links the inhabitants of both worlds. In this light, it becomes difficult to know when and how to separate the 'savage' and 'civilized' realms of culture or to determine where one ends and the other begins.[11] Without intending to, ethnology turned into a "counter-science."[12]

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8 On the basic scheme of projection in cultural theory around 1900, cf. Jutta Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung. Zur Denkfigur der Projektion in Psychophysiologie, Kulturtheorie, Ästhetik und Literatur der frühen Moderne* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2005). For a list of critiques of the "'savage' slot and [...] related manifestations," as well as remarks concerning "neo-primitivism as an anti-primitivist primitivism without primitives," see Li, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn*, viii–ix, and "Primitivism and Postcolonial Literature," 987–989.

9 Fritz Kramer, *Verkehrte Welten. Zur imaginären Ethnographie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1977), 7–8.

10 Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society,* 4–5.

11 With reference to Wilhelm Wundt, Werkmeister also speaks of a discourse of "relative difference between one's own and the foreign" (*Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 67).

Around 1900, these issues consolidated into a new scientific term, the 'primitive.'[13] Producing the ambivalent consequences described above, early ethnology's 'primitives' were indigeneous peoples that European ethnology located at the origin of a general cultural evolution, while also seeking to retrace a universal course of human development. Often this happened by way of delineating different stages through which humankind must pass. Examples include the scheme outlined in Wilhelm Wundt's *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (1912; *Elements of Folk Psychology*, 1916), where the culture of "primitive man" gives way to the age of totemism, then to the age of heroes and gods, which leads finally to a state of (full) humanity. This developmental discourse never loses sight of the question of how to position the 'primitive' in relation to modernity – in other words, how to simultaneously liken the two while keeping them at a distance from each other. This is why early ethnology was profoundly shaped by the paradigm of the 'primitive.' It not only determined the field's emergence but also its basic assumptions, inquiries, and methods, as I would like to show in my examination of Edward Tylor's foundational work in the next section.

The Paradigm of the 'Primitive' in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*

In *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor sets out to examine two fundamental principles of human culture: the "uniform action of uniform causes" and "its various

12 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 381. Därmann agrees with this assessment but voices criticism inasmuch as the "privileged place that ethnology is accorded in the structure of our knowledge [...] proves to be [...] a self-conferred European privilege of cultural experience and representation by others" (*Fremde Monde der Vernunft*, 10). In agreement with Kramer, Michael Taussig, Schüttpelz, and others, she stresses the role of "foreign foreign experiences," i.e., "practices and forms of inversion of foreign cultural experiences and representations that shake the self-evident nature of European culture and science" (11).

13 The entry "primitiv, der oder das Primitive" in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* notes that the term *primitive* appears in English ethnology by 1870, but not yet in a semantically fixed form. From the 1880s it appears in German ethnology (in the writings of Alfred Vierkandt, among others) but is still used interchangeably with "simple," "original," and "natural" (*Naturvolk*). By the early 1910s, attempts to fix the term's meaning are more frequent, for example in the works of Lévy-Bruhl (1910), Durkheim (1912), and Wundt (1912). On the surface, "the model of simple, small, archaic societies" ("primitiv, der bzw. das Primitive," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer. [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 1971–2007], 7: 1318) applied to peoples "without [their] own written tradition and with 'little developed technology'" ("Primitive," in *Wörterbuch der Völkerkunde* [Berlin: Reimer, 1999], 295). However, ethnologists still in fact understood "'primitives' as petrified representatives of earlier stages of the history of the genus."

grades," which "may be regarded as stages of development or evolution, each the outcome of previous history, and about to do its proper part in shaping the history of the future." To this end, he focuses on the relationship between the "civilization of the lower tribes" and that of the "higher nations," in particular.[14] Thus, his study of "savage life" uses European 'high culture' as its reference point. Together these form two extremities of a scale measuring the levels of civilization:

> Civilization actually existing among mankind in different grades, we are enabled to estimate and compare it by positive examples. The educated world of Europe and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nations at one end of the social series and [...] arranging the rest of mankind between these limits according as they correspond more closely to savage or to cultured life.[15]

These two extremities also delineate the temporal span of historical development. Tylor presupposes that the "savage tribes" of his own day correlate with early humankind and names this correspondence the "primitive condition."

> By comparing the various stages of civilization among races known to history, with the aid of archaeological inference from the remains of pre-historic tribes, it seems possible to judge in a rough way of an early general condition of man, which from our point of view is to be regarded as a primitive condition, whatever yet earlier state may in reality have lain behind it. This hypothetical primitive condition corresponds in a considerable degree to that of modern savage tribes, who [...] have in common certain elements of civilization, which seem remains of an early state of the human race at large. If this hypothesis be true, then, [...] the main tendency of culture from primaeval up to modern times has been from savagery towards civilization.[16]

"Primitive culture" – the phrase that lends the book its title – refers to a hypothetical origin supposedly prevalent among contemporary indigenous peoples. Among them, so Tylor's thinking goes, this culture could be studied, and studied as the starting point of a cultural development that would ultimately culminate in the European achievements of the modern age.

Tylor pictures a process of evolution leading from one pole to the other. In doing so, he borrows methodological assumptions from the natural sciences and applies them to the analysis of culture and society.

14 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 1.
15 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 23.
16 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 19.

> The ethnographer's business is to classify such details with a view to making out their distribution in geography and history, and the relations which exist among them. What this task is like, may be almost perfectly illustrated by comparing these details of culture with the species of plants and animals as studied by the naturalist. To the ethnographer, the bow and arrow is a species, the habit of flattening children's skulls is a species [...].[17]

He draws from a biological model not only in his understanding of distribution and classification, but also in his investigation of evolutionary lines:

> The consideration comes next how far the facts arranged in these groups are produced by evolution from one another. [...] Among ethnographers there is no [...] question as to the possibility of species of implements or habits or beliefs being developed one out of another.[18]

To validate this thesis, Tylor elaborates the concept of *survivals*, which provides one reason his study remains known to this day. Survivals represent "processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home."[19] In the context of the life sciences, they amount to atavistic features of the cultural organism.[20]

For Tylor, survivals are proof that more advanced stages of culture evolved from older ones. Inasmuch as they defy being understood in the operative terms of newer developments, they challenge researchers to trace back to their first point of emergence, where they served as sensible cultural practices. As he writes:

> On the strength of these survivals, it becomes possible to declare that the civilization of the people they are observed among must have been derived from an earlier state, in which the proper home and meaning of these things are to be found; and thus collections of such facts are to be worked as mines of historical knowledge.[21]

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17 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 7.

18 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 13.

19 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 15.

20 Tylor does not assume that these remainders are inherited, but rather that they are handed down, which distinguishes his perspective from that of the recapitulation theorists discussed in the next chapter. At the same time, his employment of biological models contradicts this assumption.

21 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 64.

Survivals offer Tylor confirmation that cultures evolve and pass incrementally from the state of "savagery" to that of "civilization." He musters an array of outmoded practices and superstitious activities that, inasmuch as they have increasingly been abandoned, affirm the superiority of his contemporary culture over its alien past. For him, the incomprehensibility of these practices to and in the present attests to the advances, or distance at any rate, that had been gained in the interim.

Yet this stabilization of his own cultural and historical identity brings with it a reverse effect: survivals not only underscore a reassuring distance from the estranged past, but also prove its persistence in the present.[22] Tylor paints a picture of a culture saturated with rudiments of a past from which it has grown estranged: "there are thousands of cases of this kind which have become [...] landmarks in the course of culture."[23] Survivals of the "savage condition" abound in contemporary Europe, he holds, where the 'primitive' haunts the present: "In our midst," one still finds numerous "primaeval monuments of barbaric thought and life."[24] Basic achievements such as language and mathematics are said to derive from a time before time: "Language is one of those intellectual departments in which we have gone too little beyond the savage state."[25] Survivals of primordial mythology are evident in superstitions, works of the imagination, and instances of madness. Tylor pursues the "transmission, expansion, restriction, [and] modification" of the animistic beliefs of archaic people through to "our own modern thought."[26]

The ambivalent consequences of the above-mentioned reflection on origins are clearly expressed in Tylor's idea that civilized Europe harbors survivals of "primitive culture." The study of indigenous peoples from elsewhere, who supposedly remained in "savage conditions," reassured Tylor and his readers of the progressive development that their own culture had already undergone. Although survivals were still to be found, their puzzling nature appeared to confirm how much ground had been covered in the process. Yet for all that, their very existence indicated that those earlier stages of historical development did not belong to the past alone. Contemporary civilization did not simply 'evolve away' from its origins, and the latter were not over and done with. On one hand, this view affirms 'the human' as it was defined by the discourse of the

22 Werkmeister points this out as well, but he does not discuss Tylor in detail (*Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 68–70).

23 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 64.

24 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 19.

25 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2: 404.

26 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 21.

nineteenth-century human sciences. This human figure identifies themselves through their history: They *are* who they *were*. On the other hand, survivals attest to a past that remains dialectically unresolved, that is, to patterns of thought and behavior running counter to how enlightened Europeans saw themselves. The latter did not wish to identify with that past, even though it underlay their own culture. Thus, "primitive culture," as conceived by Tylor, proves to be both of the past as well as doubly in the present, that is, found both in its complete state in indigenous cultures and in scattered survivals in Europe. It also proves both to be doubly alien: chronologically, inasmuch as "primitive culture" represents the origins of human history, and spatially, inasmuch as it prevails on other parts of the globe. It stabilizes and at the same time destabilizes conceptions of European identity that rest on notions like origin, history, and progress.

Ambivalence also shapes Tylor's own reaction to his discovery. Despite the omnipresence of survivals and their necessity to the recognition of cultural evolution, Tylor holds fast to the idea of progressive advancement, which involves an ultimate overcoming of the old by means of enlightenment and technology. Apropos of magical practices still observed in contemporary Europe, he describes survivals as an "unsatisfactory [...] fact"[27] of life. They pose the danger that advancement will turn into "degeneration,"[28] that is, that European culture will revert to an archaic stage of development. Put differently, survivals' potential to reverse the historical process is revealed in their tendency to bring about "revivals."

> Sometimes old thoughts and practices will burst out afresh, to the amazement of a world that thought them long since dead or dying; here survival passes into revival, as has lately happened in so remarkable a way in the history of modern spiritualism.[29]

At various points, Tylor also expresses unease about the contemporary phenomenon of spiritualism, which in his eyes resurrects "primitive culture."

> This shows modern spiritualism to be in great measure a direct revival from the regions of savage philosophy and peasant folklore. [...] The world is again swarming with intelligent and powerful disembodied spiritual beings, whose direct action on thought and matter is again confidently asserted as in those times and countries.[30]

27 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 123.
28 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 46.
29 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 15.
30 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 129.

Studying survivals thus serves the purpose of exposing them so they – and revival phenomena like spiritualism – may be eliminated altogether.

> It is a harsher [...] office of ethnography to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction. [...] Thus, active at once in aiding progress and in removing hindrance, the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science.[31]

To summarize: as its developmental orientation follows the paradigm of the 'primitive' Tylor articulates, early ethnology distances indigenous peoples with one hand and with the other draws them close, affirming their essential kinship with European civilization.[32] The 'primitive' is the site where the cultural alien and archaic end and the researcher's own culture begins. The wish for clear oppositions and demarcations stands opposed to the suspicion that its fulfillment is impossible. Studying the history of one's own culture leads to a supposed point of origin, the familiarity of which unsettles the researcher's position instead of confirming it.

Analogy, Allochrony, and Survival

The paradigm of the 'primitive' establishes analogy as the foundational argumentation scheme for ethnological texts at the turn of the twentieth century. Exemplarily, Tylor declares in the citation above that the "correspond[ence]" between primeval cultures of humankind and those of present-day 'savages' provides the basis for studying the features of "primitive culture." In his classic work of critical anthropology, *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian critiques such "allochronic discourse" because it refuses indigenous peoples "coevalness" with the ethnologists who study them by excluding them from those researchers' physical ("synchronous") as well as typological ("contemporary") time.[33] This approach both constitutes and degrades the studied object by positing a temporal distance from the researcher. By "denial of coevalness," Fabian writes, "I mean a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological dis-

31 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2: 410.

32 On this twofold strategy, cf. Michael C. Frank, "Überlebsel. Das Primitive in Anthropologie und Evolutionstheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Literarischer Primitivismus*, ed. Nicola Gess (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 160.

33 Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31, 37.

course."[34] The argumentative schema of analogy is fundamental to this procedure, which equates indigenous peoples in the present with people living in a primal state. Once both terms of the analogy are established, indigenous culture is rendered obsolete – in contrast to the investigator's own, which is supposed to stand at a more advanced point of evolution. The analogy produces a putative identity: indigenous culture is *in actuality* 'primitive'; *in actuality* it belongs to another time.

What warrants such an approach? How is it possible for human beings who are now alive to belong to a wholly different age? To make this case, early ethnology had to adopt the assumption that some cultures have withdrawn from the progress of history and remain stuck in time. Accordingly, in *Elements of Folk Psychology,* Wilhelm Wundt answers the question of "Who is primitive man?" by pointing elsewhere on the globe: "there are other parts of the earth which, in all probability, really harbour men who are primitive."[35] Wundt affirms this thesis by pointing out that their cultures seem to be very simple, and that in order to understand them, there would be no need to return to any earlier conditions of humanity. No significant "mental development" should be assumed to have taken place among them.[36] Wundt therefore locates such peoples at the initial stage of their own cultures, and of civilization in general. He – like others of his day – equates indigenous culture with prehistoric culture. Contemporary peoples are denied their own history; both physically and typologically, they are said to belong to another time, to the first beginnings of humanity.

Thus, ethnology's analogical scheme of argumention is closely linked to the temporal models of allochrony and ahistoricity. Their counterpart is the model of survival, in which, instead of the present being relocated to the past, the past is (re)discovered in the present. Accordingly, in *Primitive Culture*, Tylor declares that contemporary "savages" and their ways of life represent the "remains" of archaic culture. Collectively, "savages" count as survivals – leftovers from another time, which stands still and does not evolve. They function as an ever present primal state. In this way, the 'primitive' is revealed to be a temporal category, or in Fabian's words, "*Primitive* being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object, of Western thought."[37]

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34 Fabian, *Time and the Other,* 31.

35 Wilhelm Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology: Outlines of a Psychological History of the Development of Mankind,* trans. Edward Leroy Schaub (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916), 18.

36 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 20.

37 Fabian, *Time and the Other,* 18. Emphasis in original. This quotation is also featured on the cover of Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven.*

Whatever is designated as 'primitive' is catapulted into the past and stripped of its capacity for development. In works by Tylor and of his evolution-minded contemporaries, this judgment is negative, and the 'primitive' represents all that the researchers' own culture is seen to have evolved away from. But as we will see, the term may have positive connotations as well that serve to critique the observer's own society; in this light, the 'primitive' stands for a utopia achieved in another time and place.[38]

The 'Primitive' as a Figure of Thought in Early Ethnology

The category of the 'primitive' in early ethnological discourse operates quite literally as a figure of thought. First of all, the 'primitive' assumes the form of a concrete *figure* – the indigenous person – through which it can be *thought about*. Secondly, this person's supposedly other way of *thinking* is one of the most important characteristics attributed to them by early ethnologists: The 'primitive' functions as a figure for a way of thinking labeled either magical, mythic, mythological, mystic, or prelogical. This focus is not surprising, given that the 'primitive' was constructed from the outset as a platform for modern European self-reflection, which included reflection on the conditions of their own knowledge. As Sven Werkmeister aptly observes, ethnological discourse centered on "the question about the historical conditions for the laws of thinking itself. [...] At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *primitive* took the stage [...] more and more [...] as an *epistemological* figure."[39] Early ethnological studies thus devoted a great deal of attention to the allegedly other ways of thinking performed by indigenous peoples, as well as the worldview such thinking gives rise to, whether they qualified it in positive or negative terms. Broadly speaking, these studies may be mapped out along lines drawn by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, who distinguishes between intellectualist, emotionalist, and sociological theories of "primitive religion."[40] These schools of thought prevailed in England, Germany, and France, more or less succeeding one another around the turn of the century.

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38 Cf. the short summary in Franke and Holert, eds., *Neolithische Kindheit*, 319; Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, 8–10: "The primitive does what we ask it to do" (9); as well as Armin Geertz, "'Can We Move Beyond Primitivism?' On Recovering the Indigenes of Indigenous Religions in the Academic Study of Religion," in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52–53.

39 Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 77. Emphasis in original.

40 In his *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1965), a lecture already written in part in 1934.

Intellectualist Theories

To describe the "mental state"[41] of past and present "savage tribes," Tylor enlists the concept of animism. Animism, according to Tylor, is the "deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings, which embodies the very essence of Spiritualistic as opposed to Materialistic philosophy."[42] Two basic principles guide his considerations. Their experience of dreams, sickness, and death leads "primitives" to conclude "logically"[43] (in keeping with their "low[er]" level of intellectual development) that souls can exist detached from physical bodies and that there is a realm of spirits extending up to the level of gods.[44] Tylor devotes a significant portion of the second volume of his study to cases illustrating this claim. In the process, he neglects a thesis advanced earlier in the work derived from the associationist psychology of the time, according to which animism "belongs to that great doctrine of analogy, from which we have gained so much of our apprehension of the world around us."[45] In contrast to modern society, indigenous cultures consider analogical relations to be matters of actual fact: "They could see the flame licking its yet undevoured prey with tongues of fire."[46] 'Primitive thinking' for Tylor thus operates by means of analogies that are deemed to be reality. Tylor concludes that the people he studies are involuntarily transferring their own thoughts, feelings, and actions onto objects that belong to the external world, which accounts for their belief in spirits and ghosts. As we will see, the same holds for ethnologists.

Tylor did not explore the further ramifications of this thesis, but James Frazer took it up in *The Golden Bough* (1890). To describe the worldview of "savages," he develops the concept of "sympathetic magic." For Frazer, belief in magic is based on two principles of thought, the laws of similarity and of contact. As in Tylor's theory of analogy, things that are similar in kind or once stood in some form of contact are not merely associated with one another, but instead through a sequence of associations are thought to be related or even identical and to entertain a causal relationship with each other.[47] For Frazer,

41 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 256.
42 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 384.
43 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 423.
44 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 385.
45 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 268 – 269.
46 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 269.
47 James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 13.

this "secret sympathy"[48] between objects underlies magic in its theory and practice, and he emphasizes that the people he studies take the laws of similarity and contact to be laws of nature. Frazer sees no need to explain magic by means of a belief in spirits or ghosts. On the contrary, it is precisely the lack of such belief that characterizes magic, which "assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency."[49] He recognizes in the absence of this belief a certain kinship to contemporary natural science. The key difference, in his estimation, is that "sympathetic magic" is based on "laws of nature" that are false because they do not admit empirical verification. Instead of observing phenomena precisely, indigenous peoples rely on "an extension, by false analogy, of the order in which ideas present themselves to our minds."[50]

Like Tylor, Frazer derives two basic principles of thought from the principle of association, which he links to a naive confusion between reality and ideality:[51] indigenous individuals mistake mental connections for actual ones. But while affirming differences between them and contemporary Europeans, Frazer points to mental operations that they share: Both attempt to explain their world using the same functions of the "human mind."[52] And both worldviews exhibit "logical consistency,"[53] in the broad sense that they are formed through rules. The sole difference between them is the ability – or inability – to distinguish between abstract ideas and empirically verifiable reality. This perspective enables Frazer to embed magical thinking in a theory of development and progressive history informed by evolution. Frazer understands the indigenous individual as an undeveloped predecessor to the contemporary European and devalues the former's worldview as "fatal[ly] flaw[ed]."[54] Accordingly, remnants of those beliefs, which endure as superstition, represent a "standing menace,"[55] in contrast to the "germ"[56] of progress auguring enlightenment and science.

48 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 14.
49 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 58.
50 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 854.
51 Frazer: *The Golden Bough*, 14.
52 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 59.
53 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 314.
54 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 59.
55 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 67.
56 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12.

Emotionalist Theories

Tylor and Frazer premise that indigenous peoples' mental habits are based on the nature and interrelationship of the phenomena most meaningful to their existence. They enlist the psychology of association to affirm that 'primitive thinking' treats associative connections as though they were objective, real relationships. This produces magical (for Frazer) or religious (for Tylor) ideas. While scholars from neighboring fields hailed their theories, Tylor and Frazer also encountered opposition from other schools of ethnology. Critics challenged the assertion that 'primitive thinking' is animated by protoscientific epistemological interests and argued instead that it derives from affect.

For example, in *Elements of Folk Psychology*, Wilhelm Wundt underscores the difference between the disciplines of individual psychology and folk psychology (or *Völkerpsychologie*, of which he was a leading authority). For one, he contends, the study of individual psychic life does not provide insight into the history of the human spirit, nor does it grasp the central role of "community life"[57] (which Wundt does not systematically investigate either). Second, Wundt distinguishes between folk psychology and ethnology: the former concerns the "mental development" (*geistige Entwicklung*) of peoples studied, over and above their other characteristics.[58] Consequently, his work displays the same limiting evolutionary assumptions that the early ethnological projects had. Wundt sets out to retrace the progress of the human spirit from "primitive conditions" by way of an "almost continuous series of intermediate steps to the more developed and higher civilizations."[59] He defines the first level – that of "primitive man" – by the latter's habit of associative, intuitive thought bearing on both sensory and supersensory matters. But in contrast to his English counterparts, Wundt derives the supersensory mental operations of indigenous peoples from their affective experiences. More specifically, these mental operations are involuntary, affective projections onto objects in the surrounding world.

The outcome, what he calls "mythological thinking,"[60] operates within the confines of emotion, following the path laid down by the affective projections

57 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 6.

58 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 5.

59 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 4.

60 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 91. Before Wundt, Alfred Vierkandt had already spoken of the "mythological way of thinking" in his seminal work, *Naturvölker und Kulturvölker* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1896). Such thought differs from scientific reasoning because it rests on different premises; for instance, it demonstrates a "lack of the idea of universal regularity" and relies on "belief in the influences of [...] spiritual beings" (252), exemplifying the "adherence of the

just noted. Like Tylor before him, Wundt traces such thinking (which he also describes as "belief in magic and demons") back to the experiences of death and illness.[61] That said, intellectual engagement with such experiences is less important in his eyes than fear, the affect occasioned by sudden change. Fear is involuntarily expressed in the notion of the demon, the maleficent force embodied by the dead or triggering disease, which only a magician might counteract.[62] Wundt explicitly turns against the assumptions of the English ethnologists when he discounts efforts to explain existentially significant phenomena: "it is not intelligence nor reflection as to the origin and interconnection of phenomena that gives rise to mythological thinking, but emotion."[63]

Karl Theodor Preuss, in *Die geistige Kultur der Naturvölker* (The Spiritual Culture of Primitive Peoples, 1914), likewise addresses the "magical thinking"[64] characteristic of "humanity long ago [and] its representatives today,"[65] that is, "peoples living in a state of nature."[66] Like Wundt, he is convinced that emotional excitation, not intellectual curiosity, shapes such thinking: existential experiences such as death, illness, combat, or hunting prompt spontaneous actions that yield items of reflection only after the fact, in the form of magical practices.[67] Preuss offers as an example the mimetic representations of desired objects. Unlike Frazer, Preuss considers them not a willfull operation of "magical analogy," but rather a spontaneous expression of desire that is only later formalized into magical ritual.[68] In contrast to Wundt, who argues for the projection of affect, Preuss takes up a thesis first articulated by Robert R. Marett: that magic serves a cathartic function. Acts of magic discharge emotional energy.

Sociological Theories

Preuss was influenced by the theories of Emile Durkheim and his pupils. At the turn of the century, the latter offered a radically new, sociological approach to

consciousness to the sensually given," a lack of understanding for the abstract, and the preponderance of associative connections.

61 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 81.

62 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 82, 92–93.

63 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 92–93.

64 Preuss, *Die geistige Kultur der Naturvölker* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 8.

65 Preuss, *Die geistige Kultur der Naturvölker*, 1.

66 Cf. Christoph Gardian, *Sprachvisionen. Poetik und Mediologie der inneren Bilder bei Robert Müller und Gottfried Benn* (Zurich: Chronos, 2014), 103–113.

67 Preuss, *Die geistige Kultur der Naturvölker*, 20–21.

68 Preuss, *Die geistige Kultur der Naturvölker*, 30.

'primitive thinking' and elaborated a genealogy of logical operations on its basis. English and German ethnologists had already recognized that examining 'primitive thinking' might afford insights into the origins of their own powers of cognition. But the Durkheim school would be the first to make the relativizing consequences of these comparisons obvious.[69]

De quelques formes primitives de la classification (1902; *Primitive Classification*, 1963), by Durkheim and his nephew Marcel Mauss, advances the provocative thesis that "the faculties of definition, deduction, and induction" are not "immediately given in the constitution of the individual understanding." Instead, they have emerged historically and developed within the social collective: "In these methods of scientific thought [there are] veritable social institutions whose origin sociology alone can retrace and explain." They illustrate this claim by tracing the social origins of the "classificatory function"[70] – that is, the "rudimentary"[71] modes of mental organization to be found in the "least evolved societies."[72]

Further studies by Durkheim and Mauss broaden the scope of inquiry. In 1902, in collaboration with Henri Hubert, Mauss also published *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie* (1902; *A General Theory of Magic*, 1972). In its sociological approach, this book finds the key to magical beliefs and practices in collective representations completely foreign to "adult European understanding."[73] The notion of "magical potential" is said to animate an overall "milieu" of magic, whose elements obey rules other than those that govern the "world of the senses."[74] As in *Primitive Classification*, the authors distance themselves from English ethnologists who derive their concept of magic from an intellectualist psychology of the individual. At the same time, Hubert and Mauss argue against German scholars who appeal to *individual* psychology based on affect[75] and posit instead that the idea of magical potentiality is evident when one focuses on the

69 On Durkheim and Mauss's project, see, for example, Vincent Crapanzano, "The Moment of Prestidigitation. Magic, Illusion, and Mana in the Thought of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss," in *Prehistories of the Future. The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York, 1961), Franz Boas also took an explicitly relativist position; because of its focus on Europe, this work is not discussed here.

70 Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification,* trans. Rodney Needham (London: Cohen & West, 1963), 2.

71 Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification,* 4.

72 Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification,* 3.

73 Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic,* trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972), 107.

74 Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic,* 107.

75 Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic,* 107–108.

"psychology of man as a community."[76] Objects only acquire magical potential through the attributions of the collective. Because all of its members share a particular need, the medium they collectively identify for bringing about the fulfillment of that wish is really accorded that capacity in the performative act. "The whole society" entertains "the false images of its dream," and "public opinion" achieves "the synthesis between cause and effect."[77]

There is "nothing intellectual or experimental" about magical potentiality (which according to Mauss and Hubert finds expression in the term *mana*). It involves only "the feeling of society's existence and society's prejudices." In other words, the authors do not understand the power of magic in the sense of an individual delusive projection – as Frazer does in terms of ideas and Wundt in terms of affect. Nor is magic a matter of catharsis, as Preuss contends. Instead, Mauss and Hubert view magic as the performative power of the collective to devise the means needed to satisfy their desires and, by doing so, to fulfill them at the same time. By explaining the phenomenon, the scholars seek to strip away its apparent "absurdit[y]" and reveal its inner logic. Inasmuch as "magical potentiality" is granted credence, they observe, the magical act appears altogether rational, that is, as a calculated harnessing by means of *mana*, through which objects are lent their magical powers and the desired outcome is achieved.[78]

In *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912; *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1915), Durkheim adopts the same perspective and stresses the *actual* effectiveness of rites. Members of the collective

> take away with them a feeling of well-being [...] How could this sort of well-being fail to give them a feeling that the rite has succeeded, that it has been what it set out to be, and that it has attained the ends at which it was aimed? [...] The moral efficacy of the rite, which is real, leads to the belief in its physical efficacy, which is imaginary.[79]

This collective event accounts for the rise of totemism, which Durkheim considers the most elementary form of religion. In the collective experience of both psychic and physical "violent super-excitation" offered by the ritual,[80] participants are overwhelmed by a force greater than that of the individual: "very intense social life [...] does a sort of violence to the organism, as well as to the individual

76 Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 108.
77 Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 126.
78 Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 126.
79 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 359.
80 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 216.

consciousness."[81] The "sacred" refers to this force, which is conceived as an independently existing substance (e. g., *mana*) that takes possession of people and things and can transfer from one of them to the other. When performing sacred rites, society is actually honoring itself, that is, its own transcendence and authority over its members. The "profane," in contrast, is the mundane lifeworld, unaffected by this force. "Above the real world where his profane life passes [man] has placed another which, in one sense, does not exist except in thought, but to which he attributes a higher sort of dignity than to the first."[82] By clearly distinguishing between the sacred and profane, Durkheim answers the question that he had left open in *Primitive Classification* regarding the fundamental bifurcation underlying all differences operative in the world. Attending to the ritual scene also reveals that all categories possess an affective charge. The force that engulfs the collective performing its rites amounts to an "avalanche" of passions.[83]

Durkheim also revisits in-depth the relationship between primeval and logical ways of thinking, which he had first addressed in his study of classification. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* once again takes up the role that collective rituals play in the history of human thought. Religion represents the matrix in which the faculty of judgment first takes shape; its terms likewise represent products of the collective.[84] Hereby, Durkheim offers an answer to the old question of whether the categories of understanding are given a priori or constructed by the individual. In his eyes, they are constructed, but by the collective, and as such they possess a given, necessary, and ineluctable quality for the individuals constituting the group.[85] Durkheim avoids the charge of relativism through his sociological method of deriving categories of thought. Indeed, he views their social origin as the best guarantee of their objectivity and naturalness: they have stood the test of generations. As he puts it, "If [the category] were not founded in the nature of things, it would have encountered in the facts a resistance over which it could never have triumphed."[86] Because society itself forms "a part of nature" and is, in fact, its "highest representation,"[87] it plays a decisive role in shaping "human nature."[88] Durkheim sees thinking, religion, and humanity as

81 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 227.
82 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 422.
83 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 216.
84 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 36 – 42.
85 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 42 – 47.
86 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 2.
87 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 18.
88 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 53.

deriving from social processes and postulates society as a new transcendental subject.

In addition to adopting a more philosophical mode of engagement, the theories of the French school differ from those of England and Germany in their sociological orientation, which informs their tracing of a genealogy of human thought. By deeming rational thinking to be historically formed, French ethnologists reject the narrative of its progressively widening distance from 'primitive thinking.' Continuity prevails, they emphasize: *all* intellectual operations are socially contingent. In this framework, "magical thinking" and "logic" overlap rather than stand opposed. The former proves to be more logical and the latter more magical than previously theorized. In contrast to English ethnology, the French school does not contend that a deluded projection of ideality into reality takes place in 'primitive thinking.' Instead, the starting point is the very real power that the collective holds over its members, which sets up categories that subsequently operate a priori. German theories on 'primitive thinking' adopt a similar approach inasmuch as they acknowledge the very real power of affect, but their focus on individual psychology necessarily leaves key aspects of affect unexplored. The sociological perspective eliminates this methodological shortcoming and offers a plausible answer to the question of how a sustained belief in magic is possible in the first place.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's Notion of Participatory Thinking

Durkheim's broader circle included Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, whose work from the 1910s and 1920s presented the most powerful and widely influential theory on 'primitive thinking' at the time. In seven books written over some thirty years, Lévy-Bruhl set out to understand the mental structures of "primitive"[89] peoples. Like Durkheim and his pupils, he critiqued the theories of the English ethnologists on two basic points, faulting them for positing "the identity of a 'human mind,' which from the logical point of view is always exactly the same at all times and in all places,"[90] and for making "the mental processes of the *individual human mind*"[91] their point of departure. Because of these assumptions, he argued, ethnologists had constructed a "native" whose thinking differs from

89 The first book speaks of "sociétés inférieures" (*Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, 1910); the second opts for "mentalité primitive" (*La mentalité primitive*, 1922).

90 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 8.

91 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 13. Emphasis in original.

the contemporary European's only in its defectiveness and immaturity. Consequently, the individual ethnologist would only need to ask himself how he, if he were a member of an indigenous people, would have arrived at the ideas of 'primitives'.

For Lévy-Bruhl, the hypothesis of animism suitably describes 'primitive thinking,' yet, because of its anachronistic presuppositions, it is incapable of explaining it. Lévy-Bruhl therefore follows Durkheim in stressing that 'primitive' ideas and concepts represent "social phenomena"[92] – not products of individual reasoning so much as the results of collective activity, which impose themselves on individuals as an "article of faith"[93] in passing from one generation to the next. Also, he posits a stark difference between indigenous and contemporary European societies along with the two "types of mentality"[94] supposedly developed in them.

For Lévy-Bruhl, emotional and motoric factors play a big role in the "primitive mentality's" collective representations brought about and renewed by ritualized threshold experiences. Thus, in the context of these representations, a given object is not only processed through cognition, but it also simultaneously triggers particular feelings and actions. On this basis, the object accrues a potency, which "is always real for the primitive and forms an integral part of his representation." Lévy-Bruhl is less interested in the origin of this potency than in analyzing its ontological state: how it manifests itself in the compulsion to certain actions and emotions, how it appears to have always already existed in the collective representation, and how it is handed down to members of the collective and reinforced through rituals. For want of better terminology, he calls such power "mystical," by which he means the "belief in forces [...] which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real."[95] These forces are also evident in the influence one thing can exercise on another according to 'primitive thinking,' as they spin elaborate nets of relations that determine how the world is perceived.

Lévy-Bruhl emphasizes, however, that this mystical dimension does not create a second reality. Instead, the members of what he calls "lower societies" perceive only *one* reality, which is itself *both* mystical and objective.

> The superstitious man, and frequently also the religious man, among us, believes in a twofold order of reality. [...] But the primitive's mentality does not recognize two distinct worlds

92 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 13.
93 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 15.
94 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 18; cf. 118.
95 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 25.

> in contact with each other, and more or less interpenetrating. To him there is but one. Every reality, like every influence, is mystic, and consequently every perception is also mystic.[96]

Accordingly, the mystical thought of 'primitives' is not based on mental associations. Association presupposes a dissociation, for example, between human beings, animals, and things. The mystical view does not acknowledge such discontinuity.[97] In this reality, every member of the Bororo tribe, to take up the often-quoted examples by Karl von den Steinen and Aby Warburg, is not just a human being, but also a parrot *in reality*; a snake *is* a lightning bolt *as well as* an animal.[98]

For Lévy-Bruhl, the 'primitive' grasp of reality depends on how mystical thought shapes the mental processing of sensory stimuli. He does not attribute a different kind of sense perception to 'primitives' so much as another form of understanding.

> Primitives see with eyes like ours, but they do not perceive with the same minds. We might almost say that their perceptions are made up of a nucleus surrounded by a layer [...] of representations which are social in their origin.[99]

Notably, "representations are connected" differently in this understanding.[100] They obey the "law of participation," which Lévy-Bruhl glosses as follows:

> I should be inclined to say that in the collective representations of primitive mentality, objects, beings, phenomena can be, though in a way incomprehensible to us, both themselves and something other than themselves. In a fashion which is no less incomprehensible, they give forth and they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities, influences, which make themselves felt outside, without ceasing to remain where they are.[101]

At the center of this law is its vexing acceptance of difference and identity at the same time, thus disregarding the notion of logical contradiction.[102] Lévy-Bruhl therefore calls this quality of 'primitive thinking' "prelogical" (rather

96 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 54.
97 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 31.
98 Karl von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens. Reiseschilderungen und Ergebnisse der zweiten Schingú-Expedition 1887–1888* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1894), 352. Aby Warburg, *Das Schlangenritual. Ein Reisebericht* [1923] (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1988).
99 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 31.
100 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 54.
101 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 61.
102 Riedel, "Arara ist Bororo," 222.

than anti- or alogical).[103] Prelogical thinking proceeds more synthetically than analytically. The mental connections between its representations do not rely on prior analyses (as consolidated in concepts, for example), but are always already supplied with the representations: "The syntheses [...] are nearly always both undecomposed and undecomposable."[104] That is also why this type of thinking is extraordinarily enduring: it refuses modification by experience, contradiction, or other forms of disproof. Rather, analysis is often replaced by memory, which plays a great role in Lévy-Bruhl's view of the "mentalité primitive." He acknowledges that indigenous peoples possess concepts, but these concepts obey the law of participation. Because they concentrate on mystical relations, the European observer is at pains to grasp them. The concepts follow the path laid by "preconnections" that are always already given by collective representations.[105] Thus, "primitive" concepts are immersed in an "atmosphere of mystic possibilities,"[106] where they summon forth feelings of a universal, reciprocal, and amorphous action and reaction of all things and beings – a dynamic back-and-forth in which the human being is included. The "strange" quality of these operative categories is most evident in the notion of *mana*, which refers to the deeper unity of the one and the many, the individual and the species, and the widest diversity and shared identity of all.[107]

Lévy-Bruhl's first book is obviously indebted to Durkheim and his school, but it also diverges from them at key points. The author is not interested in a genealogy of thought so much as an analysis of the actual state of 'primitive thinking.' Two theses drive such analysis: First, different kinds of society possess different "types of mentality."[108] Therefore, no direct path leads from 'primitive thinking' to that of contemporary Europeans. Time and again, Lévy-Bruhl stresses the otherness of such thinking, for example by situating it beyond logic or by clearly differentiating between collective representations and logical concepts.[109] Secondly, however, he recognizes to a greater degree than his predecessors the impossibility of recovering points of origin. No matter how far back one goes, "we shall never find any minds which are not socialized, if we may put it thus, not already concerned with an infinite number of collective representations which have been transmitted by tradition, the origin of which is lost in obscur-

103 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 63.
104 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 91.
105 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 93.
106 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 108.
107 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 109.
108 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 18.
109 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 54.

ity."[110] As a result, he does not stress the constructed quality of collective representations so much as their givenness, the way they "impose [...] claims on [...] individuals"[111] and shape each perception before it has even occurred.

For Lévy-Bruhl, the individual and collective do not have initial sensory experiences that are then overlaid with collective representations by means of tradition or collective events. The act of perception itself is conditioned equally by both sensory data and pregiven collective representations that always carry along embedded connections to other representations.[112] Again and again, as Erich Hoerl has shown, Lévy-Bruhl stresses the constitutive role of precedent.[113] For example, the "syntheses" of magical thinking cannot be seen as its products so much as original or "fresh"[114] events "always bound up with preperceptions, preconceptions, preconnections, and we might almost say with prejudgments." The process may be described as "a priori participation."[115] The mystical dimension that gets transmitted through a network of beings, objects, emotions, and actions is not first brought forth by thinking. Instead, this network is always already there, decisively determining perception. It would be pointless, according to Lévy-Bruhl's reasoning, to investigate the "logical process" of "the primitive's mind" that are supposedly responsible for their peculiar interpretation of the events in their world. "This mentality," he affirms, "never perceives the phenomenon as distinct from the interpretation"; both occur at the same time. If anything, he simply reverses the question to inquire how "the phenomenon became by degrees detached from the complex in which it first found itself enveloped" and came to be understood in logical terms.[116] Thus already in his first book, Lévy-Bruhl hints that his investigations will shift from the study of the mental structures of 'primitives' to an anthropological account.[117]

This project is most evident in the *Carnets* (1949; *Notebooks*, 1975), Lévy-Bruhl's final work. Almost all the author's observations (from January 1938 to February 1939) revolve around the puzzle of participation, or more specifically around the suspicion that this enigma concerns a phenomenon hardly graspable in European thinking and discourse because it is so utterly foreign to it: "Is there

110 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 13–14.
111 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 3.
112 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 30–31, 9–10.
113 Cf. Hoerl, *Sacred Channels*, 212–222, on which the following relies.
114 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 90.
115 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 91.
116 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 32.
117 This is Hoerl's thesis in his chapter on Lévy-Bruhl (*Sacred Channels*, 205–225), which draws mostly from *The Notebooks*.

a difference between the participation thus expressed in our language and what really exists in the consciousness of primitive man, and if so, what is it?" The answer given in the same notebook entry is that participation does not involve two separate ideas (e. g., a corpse and a ghost) so much as it always precedes and predetermines these representations:

> It is before them, or at least simultaneous with them. What is given *in the first place* is participation. [...] For the primitive man it is this duality-unity which is – not thought – but felt first, and it is then, if he reflects, that he recognizes a participation between the ghost on the one hand, and the corpse on the other.[118]

Here, Lévy-Bruhl gets to the heart of a matter that he had already touched upon in his first book. He had noted that 'primitive thinking' obeys the law of participation above all: everything is conceived according to the principle of affective and motoric participation in the other. Moreover, he sees participation not as an outcome of thinking so much as setting the course of perception in advance. Therefore, for 'primitives,' there is no stage prior to participation. At long last, in the *Notebooks*, Lévy-Bruhl asserts that not just their thinking but also their very "be[ing]" is determined by participation.

> They are what they are by virtue of participations: the member of the human group through participation in the group and in the ancestors; the animal or plant through participation with the archetype of the species, etc. ... If participation were not established, already real, the individuals would not exist.

Therefore, one should not ask how participation arises between beings and objects. Instead, the question is how beings and objects can possibly be released from this participation, which is always already in place. In the *Notebooks*, Lévy-Bruhl holds that such a separation of elements is inconceivable to the "mentalité primitive" because participation constitutes the basis of their being: "For the primitive mentality *to be is to participate*."[119]

Given Lévy-Bruhl's early debt to Durkheim, it is not surprising that he explains the relationship between being and participation in sociological terms: "Since the answer is not to be found in a particular form of mental activity (law, principle, general scheme, etc.), it is accordingly necessary for us to turn

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118 Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, trans. Peter Rivière (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 2. Emphasis in original.

119 Lévy-Bruhl, *Notebooks*, 18. Ellipses and emphasis in original. See Hoerl, *Sacred Channels*, 214.

to the content of the feelings of participation (between the individual and the other members of this group [...])."[120] Despite himself, Durkheim time and again presupposes the anteriority of the individual to the collective. For instance, he discusses the need to develop means of communicating thoughts (i.e., language) because individuals must reach agreements with one another to build a society. In contrast, Lévy-Bruhl attempts the ultimately impossible project of abandoning the anteriority of the individual because this temporal scenario doesn't correspond to "the mentality of primitives,"[121] which is bound to the collective and oriented on participation. He also differs from other ethnologists of his generation in that he does not understand 'primitive thinking' as an early phase of logical thinking. He faults his precursors for wanting "to refer their mental activity to an inferior variety of our own."[122] Affirming that indigenous peoples outside of Europe think in a way that represents a radical alternative to familiar logic, Lévy-Bruhl emphasizes the fundamental otherness of such a mindset.

In this perspective, 'primitive thinking' receives a positive valorization and relevance for modern society. Unlike English ethnologists, who fear the residual traces of magic, Lévy-Bruhl affirms that the insights of logic never deliver complete satisfaction because one only ever comes to know objects "imperfect[ly]" and "external[ly]."[123] Participative thinking, on the other hand, provides an "intimate [...] communion between entities": "All idea of duality is effaced."[124] The "need of participation" – which he considers "more imperious and more intense [...] than the thirst for knowledge" – may also be observed in "people like ourselves." Indeed, the soul "aspires to something deeper than mere knowledge, which shall encompass and perfect it."[125] Instead of looking for evolutionary or genealogical development from 'primitive' to logical thought, Lévy-Bruhl declares that modern Europeans have a need for this other form of thinking.

All the same, Lévy-Bruhl's attitude to 'primitive thinking' remains ambivalent. Even though he turns away from the evolutionary scheme, his work abounds in formulations such as "not yet" and comparative and superlative wordings such as "lower" and "higher," which all imply a positive course of development. Like Tylor and Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl describes the participative thinking

120 Lévy-Bruhl, *Notebooks*, 92.
121 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 87.
122 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 61.
123 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 344.
124 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 344 – 345.
125 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 346.

that arises in European societies as residual "mystic elements,"[126] which he opposes to the desideratum of the "rational unity of the thinking being."[127] The relationship between these two ways of thinking is characterized at times as dualistic – which attributes participative thinking to the 'primitives' and logical thinking to contemporary Europeans – or as differentiated – which finds both ways of thinking among both groups in more or less pronounced forms. Regarding the latter, he writes for instance, "Our mental activity is both rational and irrational. The prelogical and the mystic are co-existent with the logical."[128] Lévy-Bruhl bases his work on the antinomy of the two types of thought, but he has difficulty keeping them apart from one another.

In all the studies at issue so far, the 'primitive' surfaces as an epistemological figure, i.e., representing another way of thinking. Engagement with the thought of others is also a mean of reflecting on one's own thought processes. However, the role assigned to 'primitive thinking' varies quite a bit in this context. English ethnologists explain the idiosyncratic conceptual worlds of 'primitives' by pointing to their contemplation of existential experiences and their associational mental operations. Though these operations are thought to be universal, they supposedly lead to false judgments (mistaking the ideal for real) when carried out by the indigenous mind. Here, 'primitive thinking' appears as the evolutionary forerunner of scientific reasoning, which is vital to modern Europeans' self-understanding. By contrast, German ethnologists shine the spotlight on affect to search for the origins of the 'primitive mindset' in affective projections or cathartic gestures. They coin the concepts of "mythological" (Wundt) or "magical" (Preuss) thought, which they define not according to particular operations so much as to their specific content (e.g., demons born of affective projections or actions retroactively deemed magical). Here, too, 'primitive thinking' represents the point of origin of contemporary logic. On the one hand, the former is never too far away from the latter because their fundamental operations are considered so similar. On the other hand, they stand worlds apart because the former is thought to channel affect in a manner foreign to modern science. French ethnologists depart from the focus on individual psychology by their English and German counterparts in favor of social psychology, but they share an attachment to the great significance of affect. For them, the group dynamic sets the course for magical thinking, which they explain by turning to the collective and the performative power of its rituals, in which individuals experience a

126 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 342.
127 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 346.
128 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 347.

force much stronger than themselves and become emotionally and physically overwhelmed. In contrast to the model proposed by English and German theorists, the sociological view holds that magic in fact works because rites have an undeniable effect on participants, whose experiences confirm their belief in its efficacy.

Whereas English and German ethnologists follow an evolutionary paradigm and examine 'primitive thinking' as a less developed precursor to rational thought, the French pursue a genealogical project. Tracing the provenance of the categories of understanding, they arrive at the peculiar conceptual worlds of primeval societies. The sacred serves a special role as a type of primal category whereby the collective worships itself, or rather its power over its members. But what holds for the sacred also applies to all other categories that emerge in this manner: they appear to the individual as given by nature, not because they are a priori, but because the collective has created and passed them down. Thus, the genealogical project, which recognizes even the principles of rational thought as products of society and history, also relativizes the types of thinking it attributes to Europeans – even though Durkheim, who understands society as nature and temporal duration as an index of objectivity, would wish otherwise.

Lévy-Bruhl draws the conclusion that magical thinking is an autonomous alternative to rational thinking. Although he adopts the social-psychological orientation of Mauss, Hubert, and Durkheim at first, he ultimately distances himself from them in that he does not analyze participation as the result of a collective event. Instead, he increasingly deems it to be a feature always already inherent to 'primitive being': something that does not determine thinking so much as feeling, or more precisely, a fundamental disposition, which in turn precedes and shapes all thought. In a sense, Lévy-Bruhl's level of analysis falls behind that of social psychology inasmuch as the constructed nature of participation goes amiss in his work. In his view, in the beginning there was participation, not the collective. This perspective leads to a further point of difference and not just with his French colleagues. Lévy-Bruhl holds that magical thinking operates by way of an a priori synthetic scheme of collective representations. Syntheses are not formed, but always already given. What's more, they do not involve hierarchy so much as posit identity. Thus, 'primitive thinking' does not associate a human being and a parrot with one another or subordinate one to the other. Instead, a human being *is* always already also a parrot.

Lévy-Bruhl breaks with the ethnological tradition of a progressive history that arrives at the logical thinking of the European subject. As we have seen, his reflections and judgments occasionally reveal traces of this tradition, but his overall theory insists that 'primitive thinking' represents an autonomous al-

ternative to rationality. At some points, Lévy-Bruhl conceives this alternative in terms of an historical discontinuity, where a discrete period of 'primitive thinking' is succeeded by another of 'logical thinking.' At other points, the two intellectual patterns occur simultaneously, with 'primitive thinking' representing both an alternative to modern Europeans and a possible means by which they might cure themselves of alienation. This feature of Lévy-Bruhl's theory is the source of his extraordinary popularity from the 1910s to the 1930s among artists and writers, who turned to his writings in their development of artistic primitivism.

Time and again, the works I have been discussing also trace an arc from 'primitive thinking' to art, that is, to the production and reception of indigenous art as well as to European artists. This is due to the assumption by early ethnologists that 'primitive thinking' has survived in the contemporary creation of art: the artist is a survival of the 'primitive' and the creation of art is a survival of 'primitive thinking.' Tylor, for instance, considers the mental procedures of indigenous cultures to provide insight into the literary arts: "In so far as myth [...] is the subject of poetry, and in so far as it is couched in language whose characteristic is that wild and rambling metaphor which represents the habitual expression of savage thought, the mental condition of the lower races is the key to poetry."[129] The various accounts of 'primitive thinking' entail similarly varied conceptions of art. Depending on the ethnological school in question, art is said to conjure up a naïve and intuitive mode of explaining the world, to express elementary human affect, or to establish a collective identity. As for the artists who wish to return to 'primitive thinking,' the path may involve childlike inquiry, immediate and unconditional forms of expression, or – as per the French theories – rites through which the collective first constitutes itself. [130] In chapters 5 and 6, I will return to this role of 'primitive thinking' in studies of the arts.

The Ethnological *Poème* of the 'Primitive'

Later ethnological research moved away from the paradigm of the 'primitive' and exposed it as erroneous. The same judgment applies to the assertion of 'primitive thinking.' In 1959, Godfrey Lienhardt declared that "no one who studies savage

129 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2: 404.

130 Authors belonging to the Collège de Sociologie are also very relevant in this regard. For discussion from a sociological perspective, see Stephan Moebius, *Die Zauberlehrlinge. Soziologiegeschichte des Collège de Sociologie (1937–1939)* (Konstanz: UVK, 2006). From the perspective of literary history, see Irene Albers and Stephan Moebius, "Nachwort," in Denis Hollier, *Das Collège de Sociologie, 1937–1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012).

societies would say, today, that there are modes of thought which are confined to primitive peoples."[131] Ten years earlier, in *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949; *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 1969), Claude Lévi-Strauss had already discounted the "so-called archaism of primitive thought" as an "illusion," rejecting the idea that indigenous peoples and children think in the same way.[132] Instead, he shows that the notion of childlike thinking serves as a "sort of common denominator for all thoughts and all cultures."[133] Thus, any given culture will appear childlike to another. In 1962, Lévi-Strauss's *Totémisme aujourd'hui* (*Totemism*, 1963) also exposed ethnology's own totemistic illusion: "totemism is [...] the projection outside our own universe [...] of mental attitudes incompatible with the exigency of a discontinuity between man and nature which Christian thought has held to be essential."[134] The same can be said of the construction of 'primitive thinking,' of which totemism is understood to be an expression. In *La pensée sauvage* (1962; *The Savage Mind*, 1966), Lévi-Strauss refutes the notions that 'primitive thinking' is undeveloped and prelogical. Instead,

> there are two distinct modes of scientific thought. These are certainly not a function of different stages of development of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific enquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and the imagination; the other at a remove from it.[135]

In other words, what Lévi-Strauss calls the "savage mind" proves to be as developed and complex in structure as the mind of "modern science."[136]

Needless to say, it could be argued that even the critics of the paradigm of 'primitive thinking' had blind spots – for instance, if they still posited two fundamentally different ways of thinking or continued to unreflectively speak of the 'primitive' without contextualizing the term in its discursive history. Scholars such as Francis L. K. Hsu, Adam Kuper, and Johannes Fabian have drawn attention to the latent persistence of this paradigm in ethnological research.[137] My pre-

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131 Godfrey Lienhardt, "Modes of Thought," in Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Raymond Firtz, John Layard et al., *The Institutions of Primitive Society. A Series of Broadcast Talks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), 95.

132 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 95.

133 Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 94.

134 Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 3.

135 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 15.

136 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 13.

137 Hsu, "Rethinking the Concept 'Primitive'"; Fabian, *Time and the Other*; Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society*. On how critics of ethnocentrism tend to re-exoticize the peoples they

sent purpose, however, is to show that by critically attending to the theorems informing ethnology's earliest stages, it is possible to uncover what the French philosopher and historian of science Gaston Bachelard would call their "poetic" character. The same holds for the figure of the 'primitive' and for the idea of a 'primitive thinking.' Following Bachelard's lead, we can understand these terms as *poèmes*, that is, as the basic motifs structuring the "poetry" of early ethnological efforts. As I remarked in the introduction, Bachelard contends that the "poetry of science" typically takes form in the context of an initial encounter or "first contact."[138] The emerging field of ethnology not only thematized "first contacts," but indeed owed its substance to what happened when representatives of the nascent field encountered indigenous peoples in what was, in fact, a profoundly colonialist setting.

When Bachelard speaks of the "poetry of science," "scientific reveries," and their "poèmes," he himself brings the concept of the 'primitive' into play: "Reverie [...] always operates as it would in primitive minds."[139] Given Bachelard's psychoanalytic orientation, the statement is not surprising. Freud likewise started from the assumption that mental states and modes of expression that belong to the "earliest and most obscure periods of the beginnings of the human race" are reactivated in dreams.[140] (Chapter 4 will explore this matter in detail.) But Bachelard's discussion of the 'primitive poetry of science' is especially interesting because in the scenario of "first contact" he attributes primitivity to the scientific observer, not the culture under observation.[141] In fact, when devising their *poème* of the 'primitive,' ethnologists themselves think in a manner that they describe as 'primitive,' namely taking analogies as proof of identity. Beginning with Tylor, a key feature in the ethnological construction of 'primitive thinking' has been the supposed reliance by indigenous peoples on analogies they consider to be actual matters of fact. At the same time, however, ethnology itself is based on an unwitting analogical operation. Because affinities are said to exist between how indigenous peoples think and the ways that the first (hypo-

study, see Derrida on Lévi-Strauss (*Of Grammatology*, 95–140). Cf. Rolf Parr, "Exotik, Kultur, Struktur. Tangenten dreier Perspektiven bei Claude Levi-Strauss," *kultuRRevolution. Zeitschrift für angewandte Diskurstheorie* 32–33 (1995). In turn, Därmann critiques "thoroughgoing efforts to shield Derrida against perspectives from foreign cultures and Native American materials" (*Fremde Monde*, 18).

138 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1.

139 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 4.

140 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 550.

141 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1–4.

thetical) human communities must have, the former count as descendants of the latter and the two groups are ultimately treated as identical, i.e., as 'primitives.' The resulting construction of the anthropomorphic figure of the 'primitive' is informed by substantialization and animistic thinking alike – which many ethnologists would prefer to see only in indigenous others. Also, the historical development that ethnologists are tracking is given substance as well as life by means of this figure, i.e., the source of the modern self now receives a face and living presence.

Bachelard's "psychoanalysis of reason" examines how unconscious impulses, affects, and representations trigger the production of scientific reveries.[142] Factors include the "need to *possess*,"[143] as well as an animistic belief in "*living* matter."[144] Regarding early ethnologists, knowledge that a primal source still exists and is available for study in real life might be said to satisfy both needs. Bachelard likewise deems a belief in full and unmediated contact – direct sensory experience leading to unambiguous conclusions – to be reverie (rather than thought). This judgment would certainly apply to early ethnologists' study of indigenous peoples, when in reality 'first contact' often occured through multiple intermediaries. Finally, Bachelard stresses the key role of libido, which is expressed as a scientific "will to power."[145] This is evident in researchers' aversion to critically review their own scientific results, for example in the early days of ethnology, when ethnologists often relied on others' reports and did not conduct any fieldwork of their own to verify or disprove their claims. It is also found in the distancing and deprecating gestures that draw a fundamental line of separation between European and non-European cultures. The colonialist framework to which ethnology owes its very existence implies from the outset a will to dominate what is foreign.

Thus, Bachelard's picture of how unconscious motivations, affects, and representations may shape scientific poetry can very well be verified by early ethnology. However, this picture needs to be completed by attending to the basic patterns followed by ethnological poetry. For Bachelard's observations on *poèmes* imply that they play the same role in scholarly reveries that theorems play in science. In this sense *poèmes* would be understood as the structuring pattern of scientific "poetry." What does this circumstance mean in the context of early ethnological writings? To what extent does the 'primitive' represent such a *poème?*

142 Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (Manchester: Clinamen, 2002), 29.
143 Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, 173. Emphasis in the original
144 Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, 159. Emphasis in the original.
145 Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, 207.

What aesthetic properties inhere in the 'primitive' and in texts that enlist this category to define – and shape – their object?

Other historians of science have also suggested that aesthetic factors, a certain proximity to literature or visual art, contribute to the success of scientific works. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, for example, Thomas Kuhn points out that the acceptance of a new model also depends on its consistency, the inner coherence and unity it displays. He compares the shift from one paradigm to another with a "change in visual gestalt: the marks on paper that were first seen as a bird are now seen as an antelope, or vice versa."[146] Ludwig Fleck stresses consistency, too. Instead of employing metaphors from the realm of literature or the visual arts, he turns to music when he speaks of the "harmony" that closed systems exhibit.[147] By the same token, Fleck enlists the concept of *Stimmung*, a German word that, while difficult to translate, may be understood as a combination of atmosphere and mood. For him, *Stimmung* does not refer to an already constituted "thought style" (the structural equivalent to what Kuhn calls paradigm) but produces it in the first place: "Like any style, the thought style also consists of a certain mood and of the performance by which it is realized. [...] Whole eras will then be ruled by this thought constraint [...] until a different mood creates a different thought style and a different valuation."[148] More than any other academic field treated in this book, ethnology has confronted its past in the manner that these historical epistemologists demand. In particular, it has done so in response to the debate inaugurated by postcolonial studies and displayed in the edited volume *Writing Culture*, to which I will return below.

In *Orientalism*, which may be considered the charter of postcolonial studies, Edward Said writes:

> The phenomenon [...] as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence [...] with a "real" Orient.[149]

Leaving aside Said's essentialism, much of what he says applies to the subject at hand. My task here is to examine discourse in the human sciences about 'prim-

146 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 85.

147 Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 38.

148 Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, 99.

149 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 5.

itive thinking' and the ways it is reflected in literature. But my present discussion does not concern the adequacy of those studies, nor do I seek to engage with the real cultures of indigenous peoples. The 'primitive humanity' discoursed upon in these texts does not exist any more than the 'primitive thinking' it is supposed to exemplify. In keeping with Said's observations, this does not mean that mere fantasy stands at issue, however. The works treated here concern distorted representations of specific human beings and cultures, and such misrepresentation holds consequences. Even if the discourse on the 'primitive' is literary or academic, it has implications in terms of power politics. Said's Foucauldian perspective on orientalism applies here, too: it is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over [non-Westerners]."[150] Thus, at some point, "Orientalism" commandeers the "Orient";[151] that is, in many respects it becomes what orientalism misrepresents it to be. While the reasons for this are too varied and complex to be discussed here, the 'primitive' occasions a similar dynamic. This state of affairs is evident, for example, when art historians question the authenticity of so-called 'primitive artifacts.' From a critical perspective, 'primitivism' (which represents a Western or, at any rate, a non-indigenous bearing) is what produces 'primitive' art in the first place by inducing foreign peoples to fashion objects for European travelers that match the latter's preconceived notions. In extreme instances – as ethnographers (motivated by their own fantasies) searching for 'virgin' cultures have often observed – the process has led to a wholesale restructuring of native ways of life. Primitivism is therefore no longer just "here" but also "there." It is the primary agent, and the 'primitive' is its aftereffect.

That said, Said does not offer terribly inspiring individual readings.[152] Although his thesis is convincing, it is frustrating to find the readings of individual texts reproducing the same model of orientalism over and over. Said tends to suppress differences between texts and to overlook deviations and points of ambiguity in individual works to confirm that orientalism is inescapable. In his eyes, Europeans cannot occupy a position outside this discourse of power, which always already has conditioned their viewpoint and made them its exponents.[153] Fortunately, as Oliver Lubrich has shown, other approaches to postcolonial studies discover alternative models of representing alterity in the texts

150 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

151 Said, *Orientalism*, 96.

152 Oliver Lubrich, "Welche Rolle spielt der literarische Text im postkolonialen Diskurs?" *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 1 (2005): 18.

153 Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

they study, a recognition that facilitates more nuanced readings of that literature.[154] Stephen Greenblatt presents an approach that, by proceeding typologically, facilitates comparisons between texts in terms of how they encounter the other. His *Magnificent Possessions* takes an emotional reaction to foreignness as its point of departure: "Wonder – thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing, charged at once with desire, ignorance, and fear – is the quintessential human response to [...] a 'first encounter.'"[155] Using the travel accounts of Mandeville and Columbus (among others), Greenblatt points out that the transition from this emotion to the attempt at description can give rise to two contrary attitudes.

> One path leads to [...] discursive strategies to articulations of the hidden links between the radically opposed ways of being and hence to some form of acceptance of the other in the self and the self in the other. The movement is from radical alterity – you have nothing in common with the other – to a self-recognition that is also a mode of self-estrangement: you *are* the other and the other is you. The alternative path leads to [...] discursive strategies [...], that is, to articulations of the radical differences that make renaming, transformation, and appropriation possible. The movement here must pass through identification to complete estrangement: for a moment you see yourself confounded with the other, but then you make the other become an alien object, a thing, that you can destroy or incorporate at will.[156]

The first perspective is described as metaphorical, since it is based on the perception of similarity that does not vanish into absolute difference or absolute sameness. The second perspective is considered metonymic, insofar as what is alien comes to be subsumed under the self and its possessions. Whereas he clearly identifies the latter mindset as colonialist, the former "abstains from taking possession."[157] For Greenblatt, such "disinterest" amounts to an aesthetic relationship to the foreign. While Greenblatt's method of reading, because of its typological orientation, may not do justice to all works, it is admirably suited to identifying the spectrum of otherness that diverse texts represent. In contrast to Said, Greenblatt brings out how colonial discourse also harbors countervailing tendencies, which posit a simultaneous self-alienation and familiarization with the other rather than a domestication of it. Particularly suggestive is his proposal that these tendencies are tied to an aesthetic attitude of the narrator to the foreigner he represents.

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154 Lubrich, "Welche Rolle spielt der literarische Text im postkolonialen Diskurs?" 21–22.
155 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20.
156 Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 135. Emphasis in original.
157 Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 24.

Contemporary ethnologists have also risen to the challenge of Said's thesis. Their discipline is founded on the premise that indigenous cultures may be described impartially, and they have developed methods for countering the obstacles that stand in the way of fulfilling this task. Unlike post-colonialist readings of the representation of otherness in documents that, for the most part, predate the emergence of ethnology, their focus concerns the methods and stylistic devices employed in that process of representation. Seeking to expose the constructed nature of ethnological authorship and authority, James Clifford has identified four kinds of authorship:

The oldest model establishes itself by means of "experience" through testimony. Ever since the time of Bronislaw Malinowski, "the 'man on the spot' [...] and the [...] anthropologist in the metropole"[158] have constituted two complementary sides of ethnology – an arrangement that takes care of problems attending the earlier division of labor (in particular, the unreliability of sources). In this framework, the ideal field researcher serves as a neutral recorder of the foreign world, serving as a blank page where an objective image of the foreign takes shape. As Clifford notes, this method is subject to criticism inasmuch as the observer views other cultures in light of his own and thereby taints the record.

The second approach seeks to remedy such bias by enlisting interpretation as a means of authentication. This orientation is exemplified by the approach Clifford Geertz developed in light of Paul Ricoeur's discussion of hermeneutics. In "Thick Description," Geertz uses the example of winking, which can hold a broad range of meanings, to illustrate the difference between a given physical action and the cultural code framing it – or, more precisely, the interplay between them, which is what constitutes a meaningful gesture in the first place.

> Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.[159]

He emphasizes hereby that ethnographers' interpretations belong to the "second and third order"; only a member of the culture under observation is in the position to offer "first order ones." Thus, the manuscript appears to be unreadable to the ethnographer at first. The whole process makes evident that all interpreta-

158 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 26.
159 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description. Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 9.

tions (including "first order ones") "are [...] fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned' – the original meaning of *fictio* – not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments."[160] Clifford, however, critiques the interpretive model for its reliance on writing, which means detaching phenomena from their performative context: "The actuality of discursive situations and individual interlocutors is filtered out."[161]

Ethnology has responded to this deficit by adopting a third approach involving methods of authentication based on dialogue and even polyphony. The dialogue model operates by way of exchanges between the researcher and members of the foreign culture, often in an interview framework. The polyphony model aspires to an even greater restriction of ethnographic authority by aiming for a collage of information from diverse and native sources. Interestingly, compilations made by researchers such as Franz Boas and Malinowski in the early twentieth century already exemplify this approach: "In these works the ethnographic genre has not coalesced around the modern interpretational monograph closely identified with a personal fieldwork experience. [...] These older assemblages include much that is actually or all but written by informants."[162] To be sure, these texts are also under the control of ethnographers, who record, translate, and put in writing what informants tell them with greater and lesser accuracy. Clifford notes, however, the example of Malinowski, who published material he recognized he did not understand. For his own part, Clifford would like ethnographic texts to take the fourth approach by occupying an "arena of diversity," which he defines in reference to works of literature and literary theory[163] – for instance, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "polyphonic novel," or the multivocality at work in Charles Dickens's novels.[164]

By enlisting literature as a model for, if not a component of, ethnography, Clifford is continuing a long tradition in ethnology. As should be clear by now, the 'primitive' represents a transitional figure in ethnological discourse. It stands at the border between the foreign and the familiar and between nature and culture, and it facilitates the constant renegotiations of that border. The transitional nature of the 'primitive' is also involved in ethnology's understandings of itself, especially in its early phases. As Sven Werkmeister has shown, the discipline swings between a philological orientation and one rooted in the nat-

160 Geertz, "Thick Description," 15.
161 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," 40.
162 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," 45.
163 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," 46.
164 Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," 46–47.

ural sciences.[165] In some instances, it even exhibits an oscillation between a scientific and a literary orientation – though it often fails to acknowledge this circumstance. A look at two celebrated examples will make as much plain.[166]

I have already remarked that early ethnological texts feature an analogical scheme of argument. Other fundamental rhetorical features include the topoi of origin, beginning, and evolution – to say nothing of the topos of the 'primitive' itself. Equally, it is important to note preferred choices of genre that inform ethnological works, including the beginnings of celebrated studies such as Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922).[167] Frazer does not begin his book with an exposition of his theory of "sympathetic magic" (which is reserved for the third chapter). Instead, he invokes a work of visual art, the painting by William Turner that lends the study its name. The ekphrasis that follows leaves it open as to whether Frazer's description is based on the actual landscape or its depiction on the canvas – whether we are in "a realm 'transfigured' by the 'imagination'" or material reality. What is more, the author's own words reenact the process ascribed to the artist: "The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi."[168] Frazer then proceeds to evoke features of the landscape that we would ascribe to his own 'transfiguring imagination.'

> No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it. The two characteristic Italian villages which slumber on its banks, and the equally Italian palace whose terraced gardens descend steeply to the lake, hardly break the stillness and even the solitariness of the scene. Diana herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild.[169]

These suggestive words do not describe the scenery so much as immerse the reader in it, for one is enjoined to envision the goddess Diana coursing through

165 Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 70 – 77.

166 Further examples for early ethnology that operates in a literary mode can be found in the writings of Leo Frobenius.

167 On Frazer's proximity to literature, cf. Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud as Imaginative Writers* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 187 – 292; and Christopher Herbert, "Frazer, Einstein, and Free Play," in *Prehistories of the Future*, ed. Barkan and Bush, who credits the author with a "modernist style of thought" and posits affinities with "early modernist writers" such as D. H. Lawrence (134).

168 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1.

169 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2.

the forest – that is, to enter a picture Frazer himself has drawn. The account of a "strange and recurring tragedy" follows:

> In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead.[170]

Introducing an unknown man, the "grim figure" of a "murderer," and gruesome customs that are enigmatic because they remain unexplained serves to heighten suspense. The next paragraph in this narrative sequence again appeals to the reader's fantasy.

> We picture to ourselves the scene as it may have been witnessed by a belated wayfarer on one of those wild autumn nights when the dead leaves are falling thick, and the winds seem to sing the dirge of the dying year. It is a sombre picture, set to melancholy music – the background of forest showing black and jagged against a lowering and stormy sky.[171]

Now, description of the landscape resumes, but in a markedly different tone. The language abounds in metaphors and calls on a synaesthetic mode of perception because imaginary music complements the visual scenery. Frazer's study does not begin like a scholarly or scientific work, then, but much as a novel would – a book full of suspense falling somewhere between thriller, mystery, and crime fiction. The author adopts the role of a detective on the hunt for "a fairly probable explanation of the priesthood of Nemi."[172] The literary cast of the opening pages clearly serve to elicit interest on the part of the reader. In equal measure, it reveals the affinity between ethnology (as Frazer practices it), philology, literary technique, and the formation of fiction. On the pages that follow, the author-detective presents himself as cannily interpreting an array of myths and legends, "stories told to account for Diana's worship" that he bluntly qualifies as "unhistorical."[173]

The opening of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, which is equally famous, follows another literary strategy.[174] The organization is tripar-

170 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1.
171 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2.
172 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3.
173 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 6.
174 Already in his preface to *Argonauts*, Frazer draws attention to the literary qualities of Malinowski's descriptions, comparing the artistry of his character sketches to Shakespeare's (Fraz-

tite: First comes a description of the population of the South Sea islanders, written in the style of an encyclopedia entry. Next, Malinowski offers a methodological reflection that focuses on the relationship between, "on the one hand, [...] direct observation, [...] native statements and interpretations, and on the other, the inferences of the author, based on his common sense and psychological insight."[175] In equal measure, he considers the relationship between field research and the (subsequent) tallying of results. The third component represents the item of interest for my purposes in this chapter: Malinowski means to provide a "brief outline of an Ethnographer's tribulations as lived through by myself."[176] Over and over, the autobiographical narration asks that readers use their imagination to picture themselves in the author's shoes.[177]

> Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. [...] Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. [...] This exactly describes my first initiation into field work on the south coast of New Guinea. I well remember the long visits I paid to the villages during the first weeks; the feeling of hopelessness and despair after many obstinate but futile attempts had entirely failed to bring me into real touch with the natives, or supply me with any material. I had periods of despondency, when I buried myself in the reading of novels [...]. Imagine yourself then, making your first entry into the village.[178]

er, "Preface," in Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, x). For a thorough discussion see Harry C. Payne, "Malinowski's Style," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 125.6 (1981). Payne demonstrates, among other things, that Malinowski's writing is marked by three features reflecting his adoption of "native rhetoric" (424). Cf. also Clifford Geertz's reflections on "I-Witnessing" in Malinowski, especially his *Diary* (contemporaneous with *Argonauts*) ("I-Witnessing. Malinowski's Children," in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988]). For discussion of Malinowski's relationship to Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (especially in the *Diary*), see Clifford, "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski," in *The Predicament of Culture, Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

175 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melenesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932), 3.

176 Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,* 4.

177 For Frazer's influence on Malinowski, cf. George W. Stocking, Jr., "'Cultural Darwinism' and 'Philosophical Idealism,'" in *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 53; Stocking goes on to show how *Argonauts* may be read as a "euhemerist myth" (56).

178 Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,* 4.

Autobiography also features in the following section, into which the author interlaces descriptions of the "*proper conditions for ethnographic work.*"

> Soon after I had established myself in Omarakana [...], I began to take part [...] in the village life [...]. I would get out from under my mosquito net, to find around me the village life beginning to stir [...]. As I went on my morning walk through the village, I could see intimate details of family life, of toilet, cooking, taking of meals.[179]

In sum, Malinowski's introduction is constantly switching between analysis, description, and argument, on the one hand, and narrative autobiography, on the other. While this style serves to pique interest, even more importantly, it underscores the first-hand experience that affirms the writer's authority. As noted above, Clifford identifies this strategy as the earliest of four ways of establishing the veracity of ethnological claims.

Alternation between these two styles, which could be associated with the rhetorical level of *dispositio*, also occurs in other ethnological texts, particularly at points when the discussion concerns the customs of native peoples or the field researcher's experience gathering data for analysis. Often, such narrative passages, set apart from the rest of the text, are in fact quotations; the author himself has not performed any investigations on site and must rely on the stories of others. This is the case for Lévy-Bruhl. A great number of particularly impressive passages of this type are featured in chapter 8 of his first book, for example, which examines relations between the living and the dead. Thus, the story is told of a young girl who married her betrothed's ghost. Lévy-Bruhl then interprets the tale to demonstrate that "primitives" have "mystic" ideas about life and death that cannot be grasped with "our" concepts.[180] These narrative inlays admit comparison with case histories in clinical psychology, to which I will return in chapters 3, 4, and 8.[181] Such passages purport to be based on empirical facts – and even when myths or legends stand at issue, these are understood as empirical data documenting a collective's worldview. Also, these narrative inlays claim to report the specific beliefs and practices of one particular culture, which

179 Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 7. Emphasis in original.

180 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 273.

181 Needless to say, numerous differences also exist, for instance, the absence of a fixed narrative scheme (e. g., the figures of doctor and patient or the arc from symptom to crisis to resolution); nor is it a matter of incidents that are subsequently brought into chronological and causal order. See Chapters 3 and 4 especially for fuller discussions.

are at the same time supposed to open a broader anthropological horizon – Lévy-Bruhl, for example, speaks of how 'primitives' view the dead in general.

The rhetorical and literary aspects of these (and other) ethnological texts point to their fictionality in a twofold sense: First, in that Geertz demonstrates how the ethnologist's 'reading' of a culture yields a fabrication – a fiction in the sense of the Latin *fingere*. Second, in the more radical meaning of fictionality that Clifford outlines in his introduction to *Writing Culture:* "the fact that [ethnography] is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures."[182] In contrast to Geertz, Clifford's concept of fiction explicitly incorporates *inventio*, the rhetorical canon for devising "things not actually real."[183] At the same time, another shade of meaning is at play in the closely related *invenire*, or discovery. He does not claim that ethnographic texts present a mere concoction, but rather a "true fiction," which occupies a space somewhere between invention and discovery. The researcher confronts what Clifford considers a moral demand to be cognizant of this unavoidable fact and to bear it in mind when writing: "Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete. [...] A rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact."[184] One option for handling this situation is to go on the offense and ennoble ethnography's rhetorical and literary features as desired methods. Examples of such an approach include Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, which proposes "to narrate a history" on the model of the novel. With an eye to the three unities of classical drama, Todorov has the authors of the texts discussed speak both in monologue and in concert, to bring forth a polyphony of voices. That said, Todorov also takes pains to avoid presenting complete inventions. His aim is to provide an "exemplary story,"[185] that is, "one that will be as true as possible."[186]

Frazer and Malinowski do not share this goal and offer no reflections on the necessary fictionality of their studies, but the literary traits of their texts reveal it

182 Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2.

183 Clifford, "Introduction," 6.

184 Clifford, "Introduction," 7.

185 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Conquest of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 4.

186 This might be the only possible outcome of the dilemma identified by Kuper (*The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformation of a Myth* [London: Routledge, 2005], 201–224) and Li, among others, that recent postcolonial and "native" positions get entangled in an "anti-primitivist primitivism without primitives" (*The Neo-Primitivist Turn*, ix), which is essentialist instead of openly utopian (that is, fictional).

nevertheless. Above, I pointed out that early ethnological works often affirmed the proximity of 'primitive thinking' to artistic creation. The partial literariness these texts exhibit introduces yet another dimension where ethnology proves its relevance for literature. If ethnology is always already (also) literature, the opposite holds as well. Literature itself can claim to be ethnology – or, at any rate, an "imaginary ethnography"[187] that recognizes from its inception that 'primitive thinking' amounts to a fiction of the author's own culture, and that the author's own culture represents the actual focus of attention and conundrum to be explained.[188]

187 Gabriele Schwab, *Imaginary Ethnographies. Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

188 A particularly interesting author in this context is the writer *and* ethnologist Michel Leiris. For extensive discussion, cf. Irene Albers, *Der diskrete Charme der Anthropologie. Michel Leiris' ethnologische Poetik* (Konstanz: UVK, 2018), especially 25–46; see also Marie-Denise Shelton, "Primitive Self: Colonial Impulses in Michel Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme*," in *Prehistories of the Future*, ed. Barkan and Bush; and Marjorie Perloff, "Tolerance and Taboo," in *Prehistories of the Future*, ed. Barkan and Bush.