

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

Transformed understanding of 'primitive man'

POWERFUL THINKER

Anthropologist towered over France's intellectual scene in 1960s and 1970s

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN
NEW YORK TIMES

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist who transformed Western understanding of what was once called "primitive man" and who towered over the French intellectual scene in the 1960s and '70s, has died at 100.

His son, Laurent, said Lévi-Strauss died of cardiac arrest on Friday at his home in Paris. His death was announced yesterday, the same day he was buried in the village of Lignerolles, in the Côte-d'Or region southeast of Paris, where he had a country home.

"He had expressed the wish to have a discreet and sober funeral, with his family, in his country house," his son said. "He was attached to this place; he liked to take walks in the forest, and the cemetery where he is now buried is just on the edge of this forest."

A powerful thinker, he became an avatar of "structuralism," a school of thought in which universal "structures" were believed to underlie all human activity, giving shape to seemingly disparate cultures and creations. His work was a profound influence even on his critics, of which there were many.

There has been no comparable successor to him in France. And his writing — a mixture of the pedantic and the poetic, full of daring juxtapositions, intricate argument and elaborate metaphors — resembles little that had come before in anthropology.

"People realize he is one of the great intellectual heroes of the 20th century," Philippe Descola, chairperson of the anthropology depart-



PASCAL PAVANI AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE FILE PHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES
Claude Lévi-Strauss, who died at 100, with his wife, Monique, in 2005.

ment at the Collège de France, said last November on the centenary of Lévi-Strauss's birth. Lévi-Strauss was so revered that at least 25 countries celebrated his 100th birthday.

A descendant of a distinguished French-Jewish artistic family, Lévi-Strauss was a quintessential French intellectual, as comfortable in the public sphere as in the academy.

He taught at universities in Paris, New York and Sao Paulo, and also worked for the United Nations and the French government.

His legacy is imposing. Mythologies, his four-volume work about the structure of native mythology in the Americas, attempts nothing less than an interpretation of the world of culture and custom, shaped by analysis of several hundred myths of little-known tribes and traditions.

The volumes — The Raw and the Cooked, From Honey to Ashes, The Origin of Table Manners and The Naked Man, published from 1964 to 1971 — challenge the reader with their complex interweaving of theme and detail. In his analysis of myth and culture, Lévi-Strauss might contrast imagery of monkeys and jaguars; consider the differences in meaning of roasted and boiled food (cannibals, he suggested,

tended to boil their friends and roast their enemies); and establish connections between weird mythological tales and ornate laws of marriage and kinship.

Many of his books include diagrams that look like maps of interstellar geometry, formulas that evoke mathematical techniques, and black-and-white photographs of scarified faces and exotic rituals that he made during his field work.

His interpretations of North and South American myths were pivotal in changing Western thinking about so-called primitive societies.

He began challenging the conventional wisdom about them shortly after beginning his anthropological research in the 1930s — an experience that became the basis of an acclaimed 1955 book, Tristes Tropiques, a sort of anthropological meditation based on his travels in Brazil and elsewhere.

The accepted view held that primitive societies were intellectually unimaginative and temperamentally irrational, basing their approaches to life and religion on the satisfaction of urgent needs for food, clothing and shelter.

Lévi-Strauss rescued his subjects from this limited perspective.

Beginning with the Caduveo and Bororo tribes in the Mato Grosso region of Brazil, where he did his first and primary fieldwork, he found among them a dogged quest not just to satisfy material needs but also to understand origins, a sophisticated logic that governed even the most bizarre myths, and an implicit sense of order and design, even among tribes who practiced ruthless warfare.

Lévi-Strauss's ideas shook his field. But his critics were plentiful. They attacked him for ignoring history and geography, using myths from one place and time to help illuminate myths from another, without demonstrating any direct connection or influence.

In an influential critical survey of his work in 1970, Cambridge University anthropologist Edmund Leach wrote of Lévi-Strauss: "Even now, despite his immense prestige, the critics among his professional colleagues greatly outnumber the disciples."

Leach himself doubted whether Lévi-Strauss, during his fieldwork in Brazil, could have conversed with "any of his native informants in their native language" or stayed long enough to confirm his first impressions.

Lévi-Strauss's key books

Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote about 30 books, including A World On The Wane in 1955, about the Amazon basin. Other major books included:

The Elementary Structures of Kinship

Race and History

Structural Anthropology

Totemism

The Savage Mind

The Raw and the Cooked

From Honey to Ashes

The Origin of Table Manners

The Naked Man

Structural Anthropology, Vol. 2

The Way of the Masks

Anthropology and Myth: Lectures, 1951-1982

The Jealous Potter

Look, Listen, Read

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Building for success

New hospitals will make the McGill University Health Centre an even better place to work

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A HOSPITAL PHARMACIST to ascend the ranks until she becomes a Director in a world-renowned university health centre, overseeing more than 250 employees, including 80 pharmacists? "It's simple, really," explains Patricia Lefebvre, who was hired in 1985 at the Montreal General Hospital and is now Director of Pharmacy for the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC). "You need drive, perseverance and an employer that gives you opportunities to shine."

Making a great place to work even better

Great co-workers and a stimulating environment have always been par for the course at the MUHC. But now, thanks to the MUHC's \$2.2 billion redevelopment project, set to start construction later this year, caregivers will get to come to work in some of the most modern hospital facilities in North America.

From the very beginning, the needs of the MUHC's staff have been at the heart of the design of the new campuses. The new MUHC will be home to some of the most advanced medical technologies in North America, ensuring that doctors, nurses, professionals and staff have the very best equipment at their fingertips.

In addition to housing cutting-edge tools, work spaces at the new MUHC will be carefully designed to promote comfort



Howell Lin, a seasoned physiotherapist at the MGH is participating in a research program on new rehabilitation methods to help cranial trauma victims regain their abilities more rapidly.



The single patient rooms of the new MUHC will provide the most optimum working environment for staff: easily accessible medical equipment, more space to circulate and maneuver equipment, a working station which includes a sink

and efficiency. For example, nurses in hospitals walk on average 12 kilometres a day. Thanks to decentralized work stations, nurses will save steps, energy and time, making them more available to do what they do best: care for patients.

"The new MUHC will offer an extraordinary work environment, innovative technologies and a vision of health care that will help every employee do their very best for our patients."

A healing environment, inside and out

Outside of operating rooms and care units, the new MUHC will also offer a host of amenities to make working life more enjoyable. Daycares, on-site pharmacies, retail areas, reserved parking areas for

employees, staff lounges and rest areas will abound at the new campuses. As well, natural light and access to green spaces will help alleviate stress and create opportunities for rejuvenation. Caring for our environment is also at the

top of the MUHC's priority list: not only will the new campuses be some of the greenest in the country, but bike paths and access to public transit will make it easy for earth-minded employees to do their part.

For her part, Patricia Lefebvre could not

be happier that her professional home for more than twenty years will offer future employees so many remarkable opportunities. "The new MUHC will offer an extraordinary work environment, innovative technologies and a vision of health care that will help every employee do their very best for our patients."

Join our world-class team

As we build the MUHC of the future, we're looking for talented people who thrive in an environment where teamwork, initiative and energy are built in to every job description. Join the MUHC today and experience the benefits of working for one of Montreal's Top 15 Employers.

Many positions are available; to learn more, visit www.muhc.ca/careers.

The New MUHC: Transforming Health Care for Generations



Centre universitaire de santé McGill
McGill University Health Centre

The Best Care for Life Campaign
514 934-1934, 71552
muhc.ca/cause