

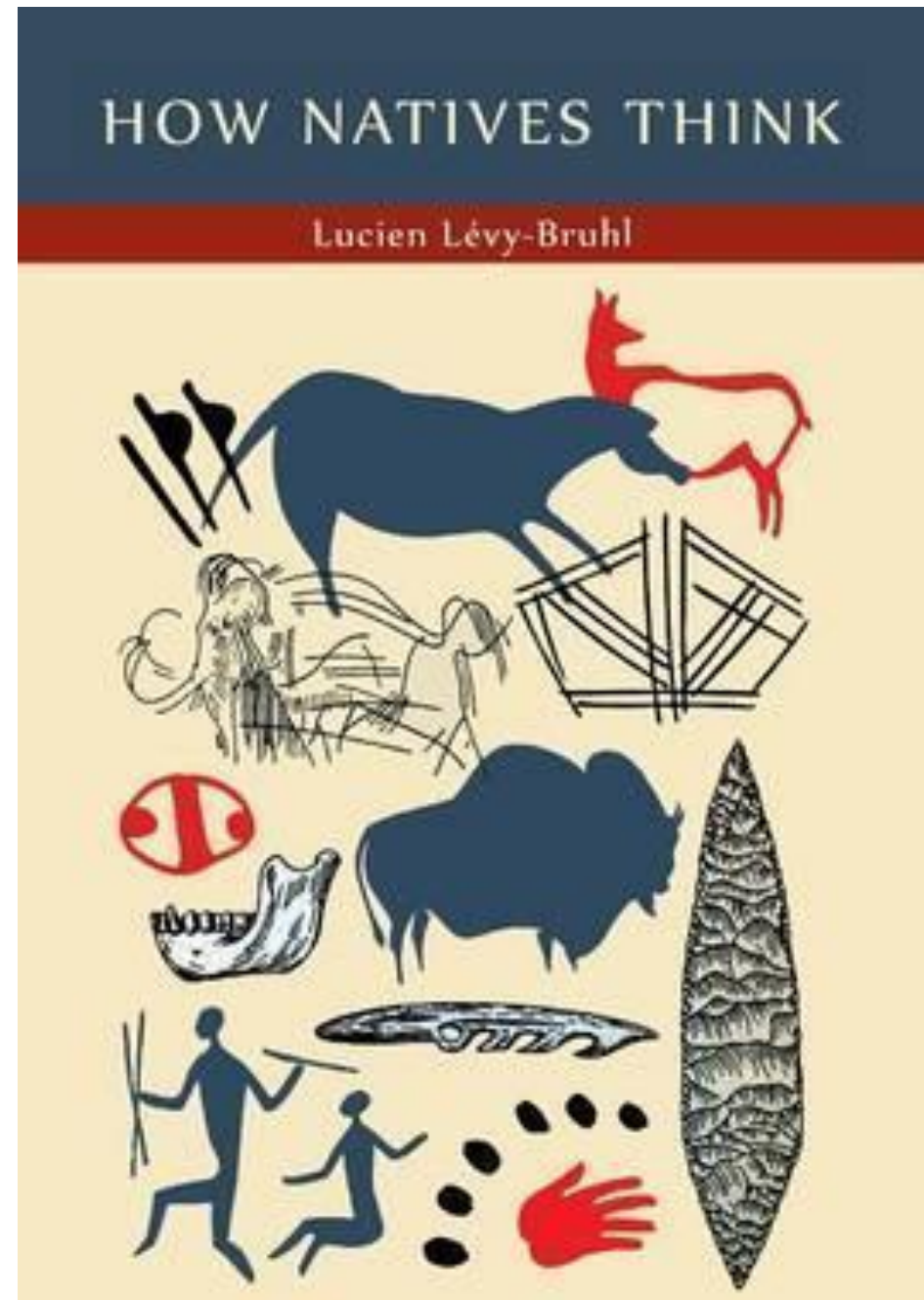
Lucien Lévy-Bruhl

Participation as a product of Phenomenology

Dr Bernadette Brady
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU —————
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
————— UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David



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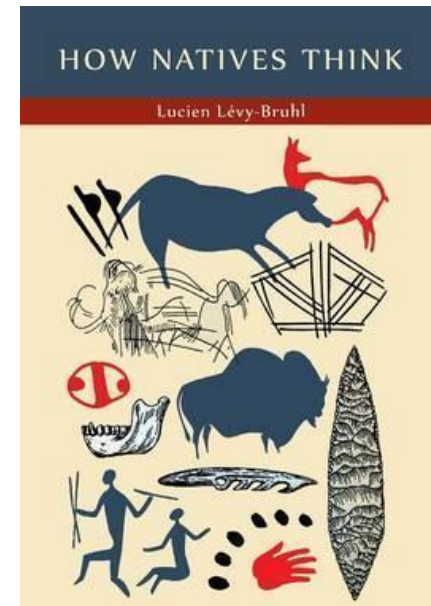


Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939)

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states:

‘French philosopher whose study of the psychology of primitive peoples gave anthropology a new approach to understanding irrational factors in social thought and primitive religion and mythology.’

From the French sociologist Émile Durkheim he adopted the concept of *représentations collectives*, or group ideas, which account for differences in reasoning between people in primitive societies and those in modern Western ones. He suggested that primitive thought and perceptions are pervaded by mysticism and that the primitive mentality, though not opposed to the laws of logic, is not governed exclusively by them.’



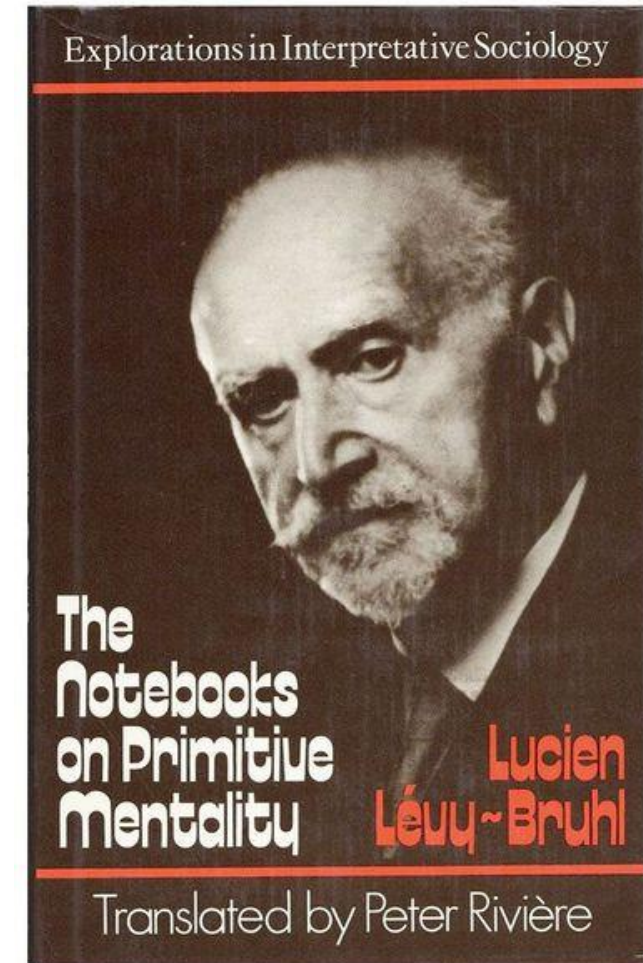
Lucien Lévy-Bruhl on Mythology

‘Myths and legends are true stories, but their “truth” has characteristics which distinguish it from that of the events of everyday life.’¹

‘Myths are histories which have truly happened but which have taken place in a time, in a space, and in a world which is not identical with the time, space and world of the present, and which, though distinct if not separate, is no less “real”’.²

Lévy-Bruhl combines myth with participation and states:

‘There is nothing further to seek when the myth is spoken.’³



1. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The notebooks on primitive mentality* trans. Peter Rivière (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 63.

2, *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 63.

3 *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 109.

Defining participation as a feature of human life



Lévy-Bruhl made the point that life itself contains participation, as Leenhardt wrote:

‘It is immanent in the individual, a condition of existence. To exist is to participate in a mystical forces, essences and reality.’

Leenhardt, *The Preface of, The notebooks on primitive mentality by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl* xx.



Lévy-Bruhl wrote:

, 'One lives in two worlds without needing to understand either of them, the first, the natural world, is imposed on them the other, the supernatural world, is revealed to them, and they look no further.'

Lévy-Bruhl, *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 139.

Defining the experience of participation

- ‘Participation is first felt before it is thought.’ ¹
- In a state of participation the individual will put up with two incompatible certainties, and unlike another person will not believe that they are obliged to choose.²
- Each participation, each felt moment of ‘belonging’ is unique and does not preclude any other experience. Lévy-Bruhl adds that although ‘each participation is individual, the general element is of an affective order.’ ³
- With participation there does not need to be the surety of visible causal order but rather on assemblages, of solidarities, of membership to a place of common participations.

1- *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 2-3

2 – *Re worked from, The notebooks on primitive mentality* 6.

3 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 59.



Defining the nature of time within participation

- Participation is, an event which occurs *hic et nunc*, (here and now) 'localized in space and time, or better said which has its own space and time'.¹
- Lévy-Bruhl argues that participation occurrences are outside the normal time and casually ordered series of phenomena.³
- 'The mystical world with its own time and its fluidity, is a world no less objective than that of ordinary experience.'²

1- *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 59.

2 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 62.

3 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 88.



Defining how participation is created

- Participation is created by *sympatheia*, in this case a correspondence of symbols, reproducing one in order to create the other.
- Participation is manifested by imitation independent of time, distance or scale. 'The imitation effectively realizes the rain ... the imitation is a felt participation, and, as such, independent of time.' ³
- A symbolic action can be performed without ambiguity, acting within the time and space of participation.¹
- Such action is imitation which as Lévy-Bruhl comments is the '*raison d'être*, not by way of causality but by way of consubstantiality, that is to say of essence, communicated and divided; in brief it is a true participation.'²

1 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 63.

2 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 112.

3-*The notebooks on primitive mentality* 111.

The paradox of participation and the Mystical Mind

- ‘ As soon as it is a matter of mystical experience or action, the consideration of the laws of nature fade into the background; they are not denied, but in so far as they could constitute an obstacle, they are put aside, and there is seen to us the very framework of the ambient world, the characteristic fluidity of the mythical world which is unaware of it.’¹

Lévy-Bruhl defines this type of thinking as a **mystical mind** – that is a mind that see reality in both the regularity of order and well as the interruptions to that regularity. ² This mind is also indifferent to questions of how. ²

1 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 134.

2 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 37-38.

3 - *The notebooks on primitive mentality* 50.

Summary of Lévy-Bruhl's idea of participation

- Participation is a feature of the human mind, it is immanent in the individual and is part of the phenomena of existence.
- It is felt rather than thought, it comes from the body not the mind.
- Its reality is accepted independent of, but not in conflict too, the logic of the mind. [It is the 'reality' of the body-mind].
- The individual feels a communion with something larger than the self, a membership to a community, tribe or group where the mystical world is taken as 'real'.
- Participation can be created by unambiguous imitation – taking an action with clear intention.
- The removal of the intention removes the participation.



Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's thinking on Participation and Sacred Geography

Definitions of sacred space.

- If one does not 'participate' then one may not sense any possible sacred elements in the place. This supports Belden Lane's comment that sacred space can be walked on but not entered.

Impact on your methodology

- How you move through your landscape, what are your intentions and what questions you ask of the landscape or space will, according to Lévy-Bruhl, engage you in varying levels of 'participations'

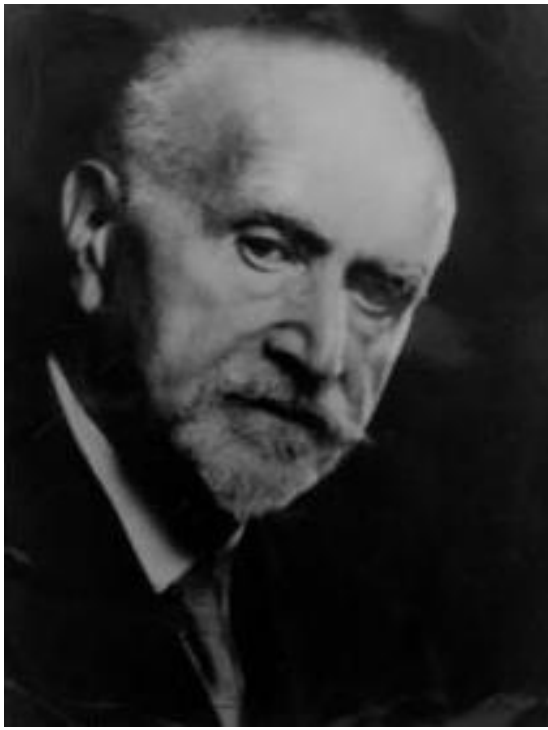


Extraordinary Anthropology

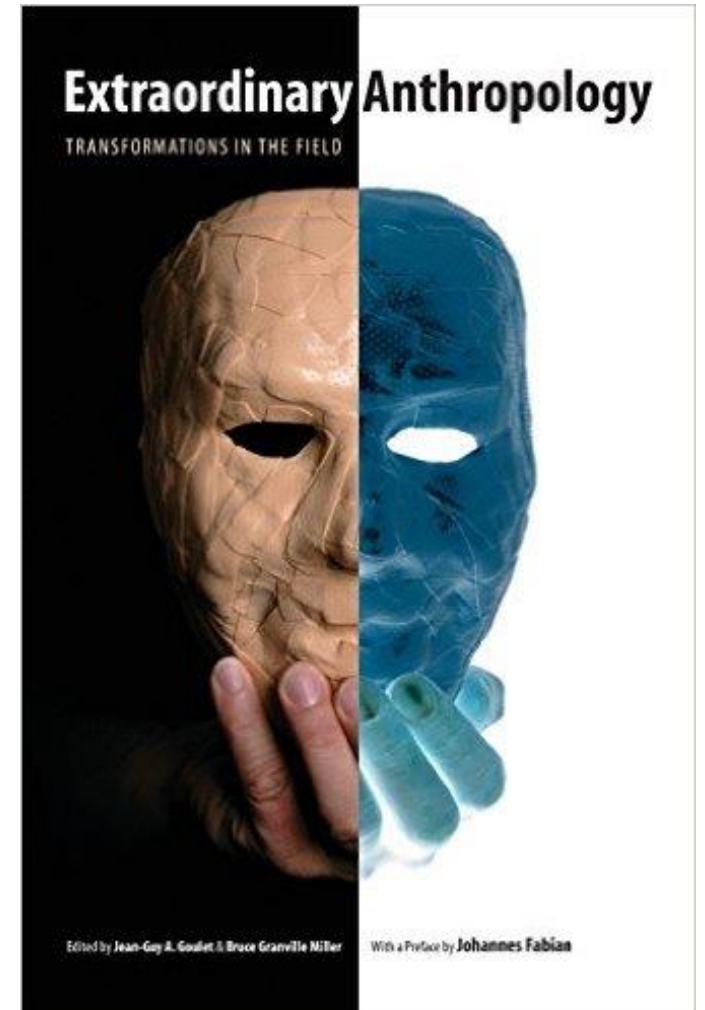
The anthropology that recognises when the fieldworker participates in the cosmology of those they are studying.

This was rejected in the late 20th and even early 21st century but more recently such writings are being academically accepted.

Goulet, Jean-Guy, and Miller, Bruce G., *Extraordinary Anthropology : Transformations in the Field* (Lincoln, US ; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). P.5



Lévy-Bruhl's work on Participation and the new work in Extraordinary Anthropology provides an academic framework for you to write up your own experiences encountered in the field.



This is available as a Google Book, just search on the title.

Reference used:

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* trans. Peter Rivière (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975).

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *How Natives Think : (Les Fonctions Mentales Dans Les Sociétés Inférieures)* ([S.l.]: Allen & Unwin, 1926). Moodle.

Free online download book

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *Primitive Mentality*, 1923

<https://archive.org/details/primitivementali00lvuoft> accessed 20 October, 2015