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Beyond decolonisation: navigating the crisis of european art and history through Amazonian Anthropology

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"This was the heyday of punk music, and punk music had taught us that boredom was a very reliable guide in the identification of all forms of knowledge that were irrelevant to understanding the world we saw around us and our places within it." Peter Gow, An Amazonian Myth and its History.

In their celebrated *Dawn of Everything*, Graeber and Wengrow argue that Enlightenment thought was not the radical break with the past it portrayed itself to be, but was rather plundering the political philosophies of their Amerindian contemporaries (Graeber and Wengrow 2021:41-73). Specifically, they argue, following Seneca scholar Barbara Alice Mann's account (2001), that Rousseau borrowed heavily from Baron Lahontan's *Dialogues with a Savage* which purport to transcribe discussions with a Huron man named Kandiaronk. Racism and snobbery would have led 18th-century European thinkers to conceal these influences and claim for themselves the invention of the concept of freedom, and thereby to reserve for themselves the idea of self-consciously using this freedom to make history instead of blindly obeying tradition. In retrieving this history, they are proposing a new way of understanding History as such, one that would do away with any narrative of progress and would see instead different articulations of hierarchy and equality in time.

Never mind that Graeber and Wengrow's account of the 18th century, along with that of Barbara Alice Mann's are so widely at odds with everything we know about that period that, for historian of

the Enlightenment David Bell, they "come perilously close to scholarly malpractice" (Bell, 2021). Never mind that their portrayal of the archaeological record is just as widely off the mark and, under the guise of anarchism, seems to make the case for the inevitability of the state (Knight, 2021). What is perhaps most surprising in Graeber and Wengrow's accounts, is the return to a seemingly very naive form of diffusionism to explain social change: European societies would have entered a most radical period of upheaval in an attempt to implement the ideas they would have heard from a man from an entirely different society. These ideas would have been immediately understandable not just to a few individuals but to millions of people. The sophisticated theories and methods developed by anthropologists over the past century to make sense of social change and of how the difficulties involved in making sense of what our interlocutors mean when they come from very different societies, all of this would indeed need to disappear for us to believe Graeber and Wengrow's accounts.

It is not by accident that Graeber and Wengrow's rejection of the Enlightenment's self-image, its celebration of itself as discoverer of freedom in history inaugurating a new era in the history of freedom, necessitates a rejection of what might be called a form of materialism: that ideas do not simply circulate and convince people to change their life, but that they re-present the social forms out of which they emerge – and therefore are not so immediately understandable in other societies. This form of materialism, caricatured as a determination of the superstructure by the infrastructure, is nowadays most often associated with Marxism, and it is against Marxism that most of Graeber's self-professedly anarchist scholarship and activism was most consistently directed. Yet large chunks of anthropology, far beyond what would explicitly consider itself as Marxist, seems condemned by such a wholesale rejection. Specifically, Lévi-Strauss's synthesis of pre-1950s anthropology (most prominently functionalism, diffusionism and Boasian historicism, see Salmon, 2013) in structuralism, must follow down the drain of history.

This matters to Amazonian anthropology as the desire to decolonise the discipline, for a "permanent decolonization of thought", has been gaining traction (Viveiros de Castro & Skafish, 2016. This desire understands itself as a broader invitation for Euro-American societies to take Indigenous People as models or examples (Viveiros de Castro, 2019). It must also be understood as an effort to clarify the contribution of Amazonian anthropology to anthropology as a whole, and more specifically to specify its relation to the study of Euro-American societies – or as Latour put it, the Anthropology of the Moderns (Latour, 2009, 2013). Such moves raise a number of questions concerning both the anthropological methods and theories that make these Amerindian concepts available to thought in the first place. Peter Gow's work, in trying to articulate an Amazonian theory of history through what he considered to be a very orthodox form of structuralism, provides a direct entry point in this question. It was related to a reflection on art and aesthetic forms. I will examine here not his better-known Amazonian work, but his articles on Scottish art and thought in the 18th century. These texts aimed at three related points. First, they were an attempt to clarify the epistemology of ethnographic research by examining its social and historical conditions of possibility – what sort of society produces people wanting to scientifically study the everyday life of Indigenous Amazonian people? Second, they were also an attempt to establish the possibility of an anthropology of Scotland on the basis of Amazonian anthropology. Finally, and artic-

ulating both points, it was an attempt to follow Lévi-Strauss's anamnestic reflection on history in *Tristes Tropiques and in Regarder Ecouter Lire*.

In what follows I take up this question in two ways. First, I explore the constellation of 18th-century thought, Marxism, and aesthetic experience that underlie both Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow's post-Amazonian reflections on Europe. I retrace the history of philosophies of history taken up by both Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow, first from Rousseau to Comte, and second from Marx to Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, where art appears as a mediator for historical and ethnographic experience. Second, I explore two formative aesthetic experiences with art-forms that express the crisis of art – Lévi-Strauss's encounter with Breton and Surrealism, and Peter Gow's encounter with punk music – which lead them to both an appreciation for Amazonian aesthetic forms and a recognition that aesthetic experience misrecognizes these forms. Aesthetic experiences, or rather experiences of the crisis of aesthetics, by providing access to the crisis of history, thus prompted these anthropologists to explore this crisis in Amazonia where the concepts of art and history reach a different sort of limit – whereas Surrealism and punk music explore what remains of art and history once they have outlived their concept, Amazonian societies seem both to lie beyond those concepts and to offer alternative versions of them. I conclude that attention to the crisis of Euro-American aesthetics provides an epistemological vantage point to understand the conditions of possibility of ethnographic research in Amazonia, and that, reciprocally, Amazonian anthropology can provide the basis for an empirical exploration of the crisis of European art and history. Beyond the methodologism of "symmetry" and "reflexivitiy" or the moralistic politics of "post"/ "de"coloniality, both Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow offer us an ethnographic epistemology for anthropology.

Anthropology's origin in the 18th century, when it is not altogether ignored, appears as an uncomfortable inheritance. The idea of history developed by Rousseau and Kant comes under the heaviest fire. For Trouillot, the Enlightenment forced non-Western societies to fit into a "savage slot" that, alongside utopianism, would help Europeans make sense of themselves and their present (Trouillot, 2003). For Sahlins, this "parochial self-consciousness of European expansion" only served to justify increased inequalities between the West and the rest under the pretence of a singular evolutionary path towards progress (1999: ii). It persists, problematically, in anthropologists' habit of treating other people's historical transformations as a form of cultural loss, or as mere "resistance" to the West - thus denying them any form of agency (1999: v). For Overing, Western social theory must be de-centered because it is so intrinsically underlaid by social evolutionism and "the tenets of Enlightenment rationalism" as to make it impossible "to say anything with a ring of authenticity to it about Amazonian egalitarianism, aesthetics, poetics, sociality, or polity" (2006: 13). Yet beyond epistemic and political distortions, Enlightenment thought seems just terribly *passé*, now that indigenous people can speak back to power (Trouillot, 2003) and that their cultures clearly persist in and through radical economic and technological change (Sahlins, 1999: vi-viii).

Marx and Engels, perhaps like no one else in their time, tried to be, as Menand put it, "*philosophes* of a second Enlightenment*" (Menand, 2003). Perhaps because the Enlightenment inheritance of anthropology is so disputed today, what, in anthropology, might be called "Marxist" is more obscure today than ever before. Does Marxism refer to a political engagement on the side of the oppressed, against Capitalism, or with the Left? Most people who do so today reject Marxism and its legacy. Does it mean

using a specific set of concepts such as class, totality, dialectics, and materialism? But these concepts are just part and parcel of 19th-century European thought and continue to be widely used, often by critics of Marxism – perhaps most exemplarily in Bourdieu's work (see Pallotta, 2015; Burawoy, 2018; Seim & McCarthy, 2023). Marx himself wrote that his only innovation was to prove that the class struggle would "necessarily lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat" which "only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*" (Marx, 2010: 63–65) – ideas that are absent from pretty much all contemporary Marxist scholarship and most left-wing politics.

The legacy of Lévi-Straussian structuralism today might appear more stable. It takes different forms depending on what structuralism is taken to be. As a theory of cognition, which would be exhibited most clearly in *Savage Mind*, structuralism appears as a predecessor to cognitive anthropology which was limited by its attempt to produce an anthropological theory instead of delegating the study of cognition to psychologists, neuro-biologists, or philosophers. As a method for the study of field material, it appears limited by its working at a high level of abstraction that may appear unable to deal with the pragmatics of kinship relations or of the inscription of myths in the flow of everyday life. A minority current has relied on the mathematical formalisation of *The Elementary Forms of Kinship* and the canonical formula to analyse empirical material (Hage & Harari, 1984; Morava, 2005). As Amazonian ethnology, it suffers from the universal claims it makes concerning the relations of nature and culture or the predominance of dualisms, which distorts both the Amazonian material and that of other regions. Each partial view does register an important aspect of Lévi-Strauss's work and, in trying to derive workable insights, shows the irrelevance of the whole. I argue here that, for Pete, it is only in reading structuralism as a form of historical consciousness anchored in the paradoxical becoming of the Enlightenment and the failure of Marxism, that these different parts form a whole that may continue to inform anthropology.

The question of history, so central to Peter Gow's work, is what is most at stake in Graeber and Wengrow's argument. What the Enlightenment signified, more than anything, was a self-consciousness of history and of the possibility to affect it. Specifically, it signified that history could be understood to have an aim and a meaning in the progressive realisation of freedom (Hegel, 2017; Pinkard, 2017) – thereby also in the possibility of regression into barbarism – and that this meaning could guide political action. Freedom then meant autonomy (Kant), self-determination (Rousseau), not just of individuals or collectives but of society as a whole. These philosophies of history gave way, particularly in the 19th century, to evolutionary narratives guided not by freedom but by blind mechanisms akin to biological evolution (Spencer, 2021). In turn, these evolutionary narratives have become increasingly suspect in the eyes of anthropologists as they appeared to legitimise colonialist and genocidal policies under the guise of "civilising" Indigenous People (Taussig, 1987). Anthropologists have therefore argued for the necessity of producing other histories that counter these liberal and evolutionary narratives and to contextualise ethnographic data in ways that emphasise the contemporaneity of Western and Indigenous societies. Much of the more scandalous aspects of Peter Gow's work come from his taking seriously his interlocutor's own understanding of history, even when these may appear at time to reproduce "civilisational" tropes and to portray slavery in a positive light.

In what follows I show that what might appear at first as extravagant asides or unserious provocations in the otherwise serious work of Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow, that is their investigations into 18th century art and philosophy and their infrequent assertions of Marxism (but never of being "Marxist anthropologists") are in fact systematically related and central to their anthropological project. From Rousseau to Auguste Comte, the radical Enlightenment laid the precondition for anthropology as a science of human freedom that would contribute to the revolutionary emancipation of humanity. The failure of that project was most lucidly examined by Marx's critique of socialism and laid the basis for modern anthropology as we have come to know it. Yet the further failure of Marxism and its assertion within anthropology as a special historical sociology has rendered anthropological theory itself obscure. In their examination of 18th-century art and philosophy, both Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow were delineating the paradoxical legacy of revolutionary Enlightenment thought for contemporary anthropology as that legacy both appears like a foreign country and as who we have always been. Marxism never became for Lévi-Strauss or Gow the motivation for a *Marxist anthropology.* Instead, Marxism appeared as the attempt to pursue the Enlightenment project even as it becomes self-contradictory – and by pursuing these very self-contradictions. For example, Lévi-Strauss pursued the intricate relationship between scientific and savage thought, Gow the speculative proposition that kinship is history. Art appears as a privileged vantage point for two reasons. On the one hand, the 18th century theorised art as the locus where freedom could be experienced in an unfree world (Schiller, 2016) and therefore as the site for historical self-consciousness (Hegel, 2004). On the other hand, from the vantage point of the late 20th and early 21st century, both the works of art produced in the 18th century and the aesthetic categories then mobilised to appreciate them have become particularly obscure, and this obscurity itself can help diagnose the crisis of the Enlightenment.

History, Politics, Art

Lévi-Strauss's understanding of history draws directly from Rousseau (see also Luhrmann, 1990). For Rousseau, speculating about a state of nature that would have preceded society, as well as a state of society before civilisation, could help clarify the at once descriptive and normative meaning of the concept "society". He asserted history not as empirical fact-gathering but as the manifestation of human freedom's capacity to transform itself thoroughly. He also denied historical distance in the same gesture, since both the state of nature and that of early society remained available to judge contemporary civilisation (see also Trouillot, 2003: Chapter 1). For Lévi-Strauss, the study of so-called "simple" societies was to help create a model for the sort of society that emerged with the Paleolithic revolution and that remains the basis for "complex" ones (Lévi-Strauss, 1961: 386–392). On the basis of that speculative reconstitution, anthropology could contribute to judging, and possibly reforming, "our" societies. Both Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss thought that apparently "savage" societies could be recognised as transformations of an imaginary basic society located in the distant past, all the while recognising their contemporaneity with that of the ethnographer. History, in this sense, served to control their mutual evaluation of each other against one-sided denigration or admiration (Wagner, 1981: 12–21).

Pete also turns to 18th century thought to explain the nature of anthropology, specifically the distinction made by Scottish geologist Hutton between "men of scientific observation" and "men of common observation". Where the latter, when looking at a mountain, "believes" it always to have been there, the former "knows" it as the product of "great changes" destined to further "great changes" (Gow, 2009: 23). But, Pete adds, this distinction between "common" and "scientific" understanding was tied to a shift in the legitimacy of land ownership (28). Kinship ties (covered by the Gaelic term *duthchass*) gave way to "rational" use marked by "capitalization of agricultural land, the bourgeoisification of the landowners, and the proletarianization of the tenantry" (26). The distinction was also constitutive of Hutton's friend Adam Smith's refinement of Rousseau's speculative history. Early evolutionary anthropology would later try to pin down empirically his "four stages of humanity" (hunters, shepherds, agriculture, and finally commerce) (25). For Pete, the crisis of this speculative history, when its hopes get dashed, provides the impetus for anthropology's search for the irrational and "common" that got "lost" in the violent search for progress – the "scientific" observation of "common" observation.

It is worth noting that Adam Smith's interest in the Americas was much more substantial than Rousseau's. Indeed, the point of *The Wealth of Nations* is to make sense of the historical significance of the colonisation of North America by the British Crown in 1776 as the colonies were demanding their independence. For Smith, the history of Europe that culminates in the 18th century must be understood as that of the self-emancipation of European slaves in and through wage-labour to the point where they could assert themselves as a class society over and against the hereditary caste of feudal lords that would rule over them. He denounces the colonisation of the Americas to the extent that it failed to recognise and realise the opportunity to extend that self-emancipation in establishing commercial relations with their inhabitants (Smith, 1999; Pitts, 2011, 2017). Misunderstanding that wealth is the product of labour, that is, of freedom, rather than contained in minerals or raw materials, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns decimated and enslaved the indigenous population of South America. The French and the British more often recognised native populations as commercial partners with whom to establish treaties and commercial contracts, yet failed (or treacherously refused) to uphold these. History as the history of freedom and the missed opportunities to realise it did not mean glorifying the present state of things but showing the potential for its revolutionary transformation in order to redeem those missed opportunities. As we will see, that the French and American revolutions failed to do so did not lead Marx to dismiss them, but pushed him rather to think about how their unfulfilled potential continued to task the present under new conditions.

Kant (1764:44) attributed to Rousseau a transformation of the very meaning of philosophy, from a quest for knowledge that looked down upon what Hutton called "men of common observation", into the enterprise of clarifying what ordinary men already think - or in Pete's formulation introduced above, the scientific observation of common observation. It is therefore not a surprise that Kant wrote one of the first Anthropologies, which, furthermore, was his most popular work during his lifetime. Kant's anthropology, much like contemporary anthropology, consists in making ordinary categories analytical. More surprisingly, it does this by showing what in existing social mores and judgements, from characterising someone as a "blockhead" to the importance of joking during social dinners, was conducive to freedom. Such an anthropology was to contribute to realising the dignity and perfectibility of man. Yet

for Kant neither his nor Rousseau's were empirical endeavours – as Cassirer argues, he saw in Rousseau's description of natural man "neither an historical description of mankind's course of developments nor an evolutionary hypothesis" but "a contribution to ethical and social criticism" (Cassirer, 1954: 20). As he put it, "Rousseau proceeds synthetically and begins with natural man; I begin analytically and begin with civilized man" (Cassirer, 1954: 22) – that is, Rousseau tried to determine what man was through a concept of what man was not anymore, "natural", whereas Kant started with an immanent critique of society's own concepts because man is by nature social.

Rousseau's determination of the essence of man as the combination of animal self-preservation, "pity" (that is the ability to imagine oneself in someone else's stead, inter-subjectivity) and freedom (first as the ability to say "no" to one's natural determinations, to determine determination) which make possible society and become transformed by it, were considered by Hegel to be of world historical importance: "The principle of freedom dawned on the world in Rousseau, and gave infinite strength to man, who thus apprehended himself as infinite." (cited in Miller, 2006: 102). The infinite multiplicity of ways of life could thereby be apprehended as all equally products of human freedom, while not all expressing that freedom equally adequately. Ultimately, the society that apprehends itself as an inadequate expression of human nature as freedom can attempt to transform itself in order to more adequately express this freedom, that is, can desire progress. From that perspective it becomes possible to see history not as a reliquary of facts but as the history of more or less adequate attempts at realising freedom which may both inspire and guide further political attempts. In this history, Rousseau's formulation of the essence of mankind as freedom expressed in and through society marks a qualitative shift as it determines bourgeois society as the first to become self-conscious and thereby able to not only suffer its fate but guide it. Yet the tragic fate of the French revolution, first in the bloodbaths of the Terror then in the Napoleonian coup to preserve the gains in the revolution against foreign invaders and export it through conquest and dictatorship, made clear to Hegel both the paradoxical and ironic forms that history takes, and the danger of understanding freedom abstractly as a model to be imposed on society.

One of Lévi-Strauss's last contributions before his death in 2009 was what he considered a "thorough rewriting" (2021: 307) of a few pages of *Pensée Sauvage's* closing chapters concerning Auguste Comte, the inventor of sociology and contemporary of Hegel. In earlier editions, Lévi-Strauss had criticised Comte for relegating Fetishism, the form of thought that later anthropologists would call "totemism" and "animism", and which Lévi-Strauss synthesised again as "wild thought", to a past with no bearings on the present. In the 2005 edition (2021: 249), he recognises instead that the mature Comte, writing after the 1848 revolution, is the true originator of the idea that "the scientific mind, in its most modern form, will have contributed, through an encounter that it alone could have predicted, to legitimating the principles of wild thought and reestablishing its rights" (2021: 307). For Comte, this was not meant to remain limited to scientific activity, but to give rise to a secular cult of the Earth as the Great Fetish orchestrated by a priestly caste of scientists alongside the secular cult of the dead as a cult of Humanity. Like Hegel, Comte was concerned with remediating the crisis of modernity that the tragedy of the 1789 and 1848 revolutions represented, and the science of society he was calling forth that would establish these secular cults aimed at correcting the excesses of dynamism in society and restoring order. It is probably

not happenstance that such a program has found its most sophisticated contemporary formulation in Viveiros de Castro's Brazil, the most Comtian of all countries which bears on its flag Auguste Comte's motto *Order and Progress*.

Yet Lévi-Strauss, and to some extent Peter Gow too, chose Proustian anamnesis as a model for their texts. *The Way of Masks* begins with a recollection of the Museum of Natural History in New York in the 1940s, *The Jealous Potter* with a discussion with an orchestra conductor on the ship that was taking him back to Europe in 1947, Look Listen Read is suddenly interrupted with a dialogue with André Breton on a ship he first described in *Tristes Tropiques*. These are not mere ethnographic vignettes, but flashes of intuition and perplexity that are not so much explained away as unfolded in the rest of the text through other narratives, moments, places, objects – "a kaleidoscopic picture of a disintegrated world", as Hauser (1952/1999: 226) would characterise the style of Proust, Joyce and Kafka. Pete's own return to 18th century philosophy follows a similar path. The first article he wrote on the period starts with a question that a Yudjá woman asked him at Tânia Lima's house in Rio de Janeiro:

> Daimã asked me, "You are the white person of the Piro indigenous people, just as Tânia is the white person of the Yudjá indigenous people. I have noticed that most white people do not like us indigenous people very much. So why do you like indigenous people?" The question was so unexpected that Tânia whooped in amazement and told me that I had to answer it as honestly as I could. [...] So I thought for a bit and then told her what I genuinely hold to be true about my own relationship to anthropology. I said, "I don't really know, but I think it is because I believe that you indigenous people have kept something that we have lost. I don't know what this thing is, but I hope that you indigenous people know what it is and can show it to me. (Gow, 2009: 21)

His own answer immediately elicited an intense memory of an episode of his childhood, the relation to his answer to Daima's question he tries to elucidate by delving into social anthropology's roots in 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment thought. He concludes: "The strongest possibility for a distinctive anthropological epistemology is when that which is initially only sensed and felt is transformed into that which is clearly known, but without ever losing sight of its irrational origins" (Gow, 2009: 34).

Claude Lévi-Strauss was a Marxist. He wrote so explicitly in *Tristes Tropiques*, where he also claimed to regularly be re-reading Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* for inspiration (1961: 61). This has struck some as merely a *passage obligé* in post-war France where everybody "had to be" a Marxist. But that would ignore Lévi-Strauss's serious commitment to a specific brand of Marxist politics for over ten years of his life, from around 1925 to 1935. By the age of 18, he had read Marx's Capital (Pajon, 2011: loc 276–295). He would go on to write an essay on French revolutionary Baboeuf from a Marxist perspective and another on historical materialism. During that time, he wanted to use academia as a stepping stone into politics (Pajon, 2011: loc 314), specifically within the (non-Bolshevik) French socialist party (SFIO). He was a parliamentary assistant, as well as one of the instigators of an influential group of intellectuals promoting a planned economy (Pajon, 2011: loc 847–1050). He was mostly preoccupied with cultural policy, which he would pursue after his disaffection with politics into his post-war work with UNESCO. Even after his turn to anthropology, he gave talks about the discipline's contribution to revolutionary thought

(Lévi-Strauss, 2019). Throughout his work he maintained hope of relating studies of infrastructure (kinship) with that of superstructure (myth).

The *Eighteenth Brumaire* provides a model for a Marxian understanding of the crisis of history in capitalism. There, Marx tries to interpret the paradoxical success of the 1848 French revolution. A socialist man was elected by the first universal male suffrage (and therefore primarily by agricultural and urban workers) and yet had needed to crown himself Emperor and suspend democratic rights in order to defend democracy itself from the royalists. Marx analyses the events of 1848 (the revolution) to 1851 (the Empire) as a farcical repetition of the French Revolution and its tragic end in Napoleon's Empire. In doing so he points to the difference between the revolutions of the 18th century, led by the bourgeoisie to overcome remnants of feudalism, and those of the 19th century, whose aim is instead the overcoming of the contradiction between that newly established bourgeois society and the industrial mode of production it fostered. Yet 1848 failed because the workers' movement for socialism was not conscious of that transformation. The revolution "drew its poetry from the past" instead of "from the future" (Marx, 1852/1978: 597). In other words, the dialectics of infrastructure and superstructure, which bourgeois thinkers had discovered, had broken down.

Lucien Sébag, a student of Lévi-Strauss that worked with the Ayoré, compared Structuralism and Marxism already in 1964 in *Marxisme et Structuralisme*, long before the emergence of Marxist structuralism or the publication of Foucault's structuralist treatise *Les Mots et les Choses*. He presented structuralism as the better alternative between the two, and Marxism as unscientific, but in the process profoundly transformed what structuralism could mean. For Lévi-Strauss savage thought and the elementary structures of kinship emerge alongside each other as a product of a radical transformation of the relation between men and nature – the neolithic revolution – that both required and enabled the recognition in nature of an immanent form of organisation (Lévi-Strauss, 1961: 390). For Sebag, instead, all men are and always have been confronted to a real that can never be fully articulated in language, yet out of which language as such, and further specific discourses (such as science, politics, economics, myths) emerge. His point there, which he aimed at Marxism but could equally well attack Lévi-Strauss, was that the economic determination of social institutions and forms of thought could not be taken as a general explanatory framework for history, but that the specific chain of causality should be carefully sought within each discourse or in their interaction on a case-by-case basis. Structuralism becomes the method of a descriptive sociology and a far cry from Lévi-Strauss's actual work.

Indeed, the so-called Marxist Structuralism that emerged around Althusser and, in anthropology, Godelier, only differed from Sebag's account of structuralism on minor points. What "Marxism" meant for them was that structures of different sorts could in fact be systematically related to each other in bundles, and these bundles in turn could be organised in a typology of "modes of production". Empirical work in various societies could help fill out the typology. It was really little more than a revamping of structural functionalism, superficially adopting a vocabulary inspired by the Marx of the *German Ideology* and the *Grundrisse* while really furthering the substance of Stalinian stage-ism that it was supposed to overcome. History, ideally, became the transition from one to another "mode of production" or "social and economic formation." In practice, the program of research fell apart as such systematic relations be-

tween structures could not be found, any more than those between ecological niches and social structure. The description of these failures became the theories that would dominate the 1990s and 2000s – for example the focus on "materiality" (Miller, 2005) or even "materials" (Ingold, 2007) as a response to the "materialism" of Marxist structuralism.

In this respect, the post-structuralism that became hegemonic over the 1980s had as much to do with structuralism per se than with a settling of accounts with the Marxism of the New Left. To the extent that it was post-structuralist, that it attempted to continue the Lévi-Straussian project, it attempted like Marxist structuralism to temper a supposed idealism either by directly relating it to a world of "practice" (Sahlins, Bourdieu) or by nullifying all relations to the "outside" as always a play of signs (Derrida, Foucault). Both moves largely ended up destroying the central claim of *Pensée Sauvage* (2021), that "wild thought" is a logic of the concrete because the concrete is already logically organized. Both moves also end up reproducing the same problem, that of the condition of possibility for the relation between subject and object, but under different names (discourse, habitus, experience, and so on). Simultaneously, post-structuralism was largely a post-Marxism, part of the settling of account with the New Left that was general in the 1980s, emblematically in France as the mea culpa of ex-Maoists and the generalization of the Cold War narrative that equated the whole of Marxism with the USSR, the USSR with the atrocities of 1930s Stalinism, and those crimes themselves with Nazism as the two faces of "totalitarianism". That second move often took the form of a critique of rationality as an illusory evasion of ethical responsibility, and therefore of a plea to replace epistemology with ethics. Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (2014) is a prime example of this sort of move which has now become all-pervasive, but much of Joanna Overing's work also revolves around this question. Increasingly, what came to dominate was a call to liquidate the inheritance of the Enlightenment in the name of liquidating Marxism.

In an interview published posthumously, Peter Gow is asked twice if he is a Marxist. He first appears to evade the question by turning to the relation between archival material about the Urubamba and the way local people there talk about their history. When the question is repeated, he replies: "I would say that I am a Marxist" before clarifying: "I am not very well read in Marxist literature. I've read more Engels that Karl Marx. I've never read the *Grundrisse* or that sort of stuff. But I have read the *Critique of Political Economy, Capital Volume I*. And I just can't see any reason to think its wrong. I mean, why wouldn't you be a Marxist." (Gow, 2023: 176). That he would admit being a Marxist probably surprised his Brazilian audience because of the anti-Marxism of both his supervisor Joanna Overing and his close friend and intellectual interlocutor Eduardo Viveiros de Castro[1]. Another reason would be the introduction to An Amazonian Myth where he confesses to having gone to Peru a Marxist looking to raise consciousness, and having left a Lévi-Straussian.

Specifically, he had found inspiration in Peruvian anthropologist Stefano Varese's Marxist ethnography of the Campa Ashaninka (1968/2004). What was Marxist about it was the introduction of history

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1   See for example his comments on the incompatibility between the sorts of "politics of the extra- mo-derns" he calls for and Marxism: "uma verdadeira consideração do que pode significar a 'política' (e a 'história') para povos extramodernos não pode reproduzir a vulgata iluminista que guia todos os credos modernizadores e 'progressistas', em todas as faixas do espectro ideológico, do neoliberalismo ao mar-xismo ao pós-humanismo tecnófilo – todos profundamente marcados pela metafísica escatológica cristã, agora quase sempre 'secularizada' ou 'desencantada': com ou sem Apocalipse, o Reino de qualquer for-ma nos espera ao fim do caminho glorioso do Homem." (Viveiros de Castro, 2017: 2).

"as the articulation of these societies with the development of capitalism and its attendant forms of colonialism" (Gow, 2001: 4–5), as opposed to a British tradition of social anthropology that seemed "colonial" and "distancing". It was Marxist in the tradition of E. P. Thompson's "history from below" (Lynd, 2014) as much as that of the Subaltern Studies Group that preceded post-colonialism (Mannathukkaren, 2022). Such a project was made convincing and attractive to Pete by the success of revolutionary struggles, many of them inspired by Marxism, which seemed to herald the possibility of a new emancipatory era for humanity. Specifically,

> if the older world order had unified humanity through capitalist insertion and its attendant imperialist expansion, this world order in the making would unify humanity through general emancipation from exploitation and the consequent social justice. Central to this new order was the assertion that all human histories were, in fact, our single common history. (Gow, 2001: 4–5)

This was also the basis for an early and brief attraction to the Shining Path in Peru. It became rapidly obvious to most except the most dogmatic Maoists that those revolutionary struggles did not, in fact, lead to an emancipatory world order but, if anything, participated in the transition to what has come to be called neoliberalism. But Pete did not wait for the horrors of Shining Path, nor the fall of the USSR, to be disenchanted, he did so through fieldwork experience. What he discovered never did however lead him to question that "all human histories are, in fact, our single common history", but rather to discover that the relation between these histories was not the one he had first envisioned, that it was not a matter of inserting the history of Yine colonisation and exploitation within the general scheme of the history of capitalism. The relation between historical consciousness and history was a problem. As such, it was not to be papered over with a theoretical solution or swept under the carpet as a shameful secret, but explored in all its difficulty. The revolution, had it taken place, would have solved the problem, or at least made it largely irrelevant. But the revolution did not take place, the problem remained. This problem, its difficulty, was to be the main object of Pete's work – as it had arguably been for Lévi-Strauss. Pete's article on Hutton I analysed above was a crucial part of that puzzle: how does one's historical consciousness come to take the form of an abstract history, a scientific narrative into which the common man should be inscribed? And, for both, one of the privileged access points for that problem was myth – neither history nor not-history, neither art nor not-art.

What has aesthetic experience to do with politics? Why write about aesthetics, or about art? In an age of revolutions and massacres, why waste time on fluffy matters like aesthetics? For Schiller (2016), who lived in the wake of the French and American revolutions and the bloodbaths that followed them, the question was crucial. What the failure of these revolutions raised was the paradox of an unfree people wanting to be free: how would they even know what freedom is? Were revolutions not doomed to just repeat domination? Art, he thought, as a good follower of Kant, provided one possible solution. In art, both the artist and the spectator could experience freedom, even if at a very removed scale. The artist could let his imagination go wild and experiment with colours, techniques, sounds – with a physical world that exemplifies determination. The spectators could also experience their freedom in their appre-

ciation for the work, their interpretation of what it means, of what else it could have been. All of this would happen in a very determinate and determining social and physical world, for sure, and yet art's freedom from serving any other end than enjoyment could provide an experience of freedom – and could return us all to that unfree world with new eyes, seeing it as it could yet become.

The idea that aesthetic forms would be the product of, and thereby determined by, specific forms of social organisation, dates back to Rousseau (2012), and was developed by Adam Smith (1999; see Labio, 2013). Essentially, they make of art proper the product of societies where the division of labour is sufficiently developed to make unproductive labour possible. Art develops at a higher, social level the universal human capacity for sympathy, or imagination, but emerges at the height of a depraved civilisation that renders men immoral. Art, though an unproductive luxury, is necessary to the preservation of a humanity deformed by the intensification of the division of labour in the manufactures. For Hegel (2004, see also Rose, 1995), art re-presents the social relations that condition it, specifically those shaped by private property, in the misalignment of form and content. For all of them, art has not always existed and may not always exist, it is rather the product of a specific sort of society that may – and perhaps should – pass away. In other words, art is not reducible to culture in general. This historical nature of art makes it possible to understand and appreciate a work of art as a specific expression of a specific form of society at a specific moment – so that the work illuminates its time as much as the time illuminates the work. Genres, styles, schools and fashions matter not in their expression of universal sentiments, but on the contrary in their very specificity. The way a work from a specific moment appears to us in the present, seduces us or bores us, teaches us something about our own moment, about the society in which we live.

In his analysis of Ossian's significance to the 18th century and to the present (Gow, 2020), Pete articulates both a dialectical relation between "infrastructure" and "superstructure" and its failure. The disappearance of an autonomous Highland aristocracy deprived professional Gaelic song-poets of their patronage. As a result, song-poetry collapsed as an institution and decomposed into two elements: the sung melody, which was transposed from the (female) accompaniment of the courtly lyre to the (male) martial bagpipe, while the lyric was transposed from an orality that asserted the poet's originality to text that denied it. MacPherson's social status as a hereditary tenant was threatened by the bourgeois revolution, which simultaneously made literary success in England an appealing prospect. The same bourgeois revolution, as I already mentioned, emphasised "scientific" observation and critical knowledge to justify itself, thereby prompting an intense debate about the authorship of various texts – the Bible, primarily, but also *The Dream of Ossian*. MacPherson could thus stubbornly attribute his verses to the mythical bard Ossian, while Samuel Johnson could decry him as a forger. The aesthetic value of the poem was intrinsically tied with its authenticity at the time, whereas, in comparison, modern readers fail to see the relation between the two.

Lévi-Strauss stated, when asked about his appreciation for traditional African or Melanesian music, "I am utterly unable to penetrate this music, the reasons why it pleases or displeases me. We call this music because there is no better term in our language. Let us say it is what would most resemble what we call music, without fully being music" (Lévi-Strauss, 1987). This would only appear to be either a subjective distaste for African or Melanesian music or, worse, a racist disparagement of African and Melanesian cultures, if one presumes the supremacy and universal applicability of Western categories. Instead, by

insisting that aesthetic judgement is inappropriate – this is not art, this is something else – Lévi-Strauss opens up the possibility for an anthropological elucidation of what that something else might be. Moreover, this judgment about the non-aesthetic nature of the quasi-music that accompanies African and Melanesian rituals parallels his critique of contemporary art and music, which also cannot really be called music anymore. This is also Peter Gow's position in his presentation against the motion that "Aesthetics is a cross-cultural category" in the 1993 debate, where he describes Lévi-Strauss as the anthropologist "that has most consistently engaged with modern Western aesthetics", but who does so "not for comparison with the aesthetics of other cultures, but as a perspective on other cultures" (Ingold, 1996: 221) He continues: "By starting out explicitly as an aesthete, and by making his discriminatory judgements overt, Lévi-Strauss finishes as an anthropologist whose objective is not to engage in the work of non-discriminatory aesthetics, which I have argued is impossible for anthropology and alien to it, byt to gain a perspective on aesthetics itself" (Ingold, 1996: 222).

The unavailability of aesthetic judgement can also mark historical distance. Both Lévi-Strauss and Gow turn to music to make tangible the difficulty of making sense of 18th-century aesthetics. Lévi-Strauss examines the harmonic transformations in an opera by Rameau, widely perceived as revolutionary at the time, now imperceptible (1997: 39–63). For him this pointed to a regression of judgements of taste. He would also point to the wide musical catalogue performed in contemporary concert halls, which, far from signifying an open-mindedness to a wide variety of eras and genres, demonstrated an inability to fully appreciate any of these works. The aesthetic problems that different styles and genres had tried to solve were wholly obscure to a contemporary audience, even a highly educated one, so that one could listen to the Ninth Symphony one day and rock music the next with the same apparent pleasure (1997: 45). Gow turned instead to the virtuoso execution of an 18th-century *pibroch* by a busker in Edinburgh, particularly to the resolution of different variations of a ground melody into a final "crown", which he was only late in life beginning to appreciate[2]. For Pete the possibility remained of gaining appreciation for these entirely alien aesthetic forms (2020: 109–110).

As I have argued above, this loss of taste should be significant as a judgement on history – it should tell us something about our time. This is indeed how both Peter Gow and Lévi-Strauss saw it. As Pete argued in the 1993 debate, "our deeply personal feeling for the beautiful, our carefully guarded refuge from all the discriminatory horrors of late capitalist society, is the primary form of discrimination – it is the horror of that society" (219). He concludes that Lévi-Strauss's project in comparing, say, Wagner's operas and Amazonian myths is not to compare aesthetics but to "turn the Western aesthetic back on itself", to "judge it and find it wanting" (222). Anthropology should help our "critical reflection on our own aesthetic projects" by "providing us with a perspective" upon them (222). His and Lévi-Strauss's later examination of 18th-century aesthetics add another twist to this critical project and this turning the Western aesthetic against itself: instead of a face-to-face between the West and Amazonia, they show that the contemporary West in many ways lacks an aesthetics, or that its aesthetics is in crisis. It is the triangulation

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2   *Pibroch* literally means "piping" in Lowland Scots. It designates ceòl mòr, "great music", of the great Highland bagpipe. *Ceòl mòr*, "great music", is characterized by a theme with variation. It was originally played on the harp, and from the 18th century shifts instead to the bagpipe and the fiddle. It is distin-guished from *ceòl beag*, "little music", the more popular music that comprises marches, dances, and so on.

of present aesthetics, perhaps best encapsulated for Lévi-Strauss by his relation to surrealism and for Peter Gow by punk music, in both cases aesthetic forms that are equally express a crisis of aesthetics in different ways, with on the one hand Amazonian forms which initially appeal to the ethnographer's aesthetic sense but lead him to show that they are not, in fact, aesthetic, which in turn throws the anthropologist back to the history of Western aesthetic to conclude that the what first appeared as aesthetic taste was but the degradation or crisis of something now only attainable with difficulty.

Aesthetic experiences, ethnography and history

In this second part, I turn to aesthetic experiences described by both Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow as formative of their understanding of anthropology, respectively Surrealism and punk. These experiences were crucial to their critical understanding of the aesthetic emotion produced by their encounter with Indigenous designs, from face paints to masks, and led them to the investigations of 18th-century art and thought I have just described. The aim of this second part is both to showcase the importance of aesthetic experience as part of the anthropological endeavour and to raise questions about the conditions of possibility for an anthropology of Amazonia or Europe today.

On March 24, 1941, Claude Lévi-Strauss managed to board a ship heading to Martinique, in a desperate attempt to flee Nazi-occupied France and to reach New York, where he had been invited by the Rockefeller Foundation to take up a temporary position at the New School. During his frequent ethnographic trips to Brazil in the 1930s, he had become a regular client of the company that chartered the boat, which afforded him the possibility of sleeping in one of only two cabins – sharing it with a Dutch metal trader, a wealthy creole Martiniquais, and Tunisian businessman Henri Smadja who was carrying a Degas in his luggage. The other passengers, over three hundred and fifty, were sleeping in the cargo holds, deprived of air and light. Bolshevik and member of the Left Opposition Victor Serge, who made the trip in those holds, would later describe it as "a floating concentration camp". Also in those holds, treated like riffraff, were German novelist Anna Seghers (a founder of the (Stalinian) Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors), historian of Impressionism John Rewald, as well as André Breton – walking around in a plush coat that, Lévi-Strauss writes in Tristes Tropiques, "made him look like a blue bear".

Lévi-Strauss would later credit his lengthy conversations about the nature of the work of art with Breton during the three months that it took to get to Martinique, as well as their subsequent friendship, for opening up his aesthetic horizons. It started with a "note on the relations between the work of art and the document" that the former wrote and to which the latter responded, both texts having since been published in one of Lévi-Strauss's last works, *Seeing Listening Reading* (1993). The note revolves around what it means for Breton in the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* to define "artistic creation in terms of the absolutely spontaneous activity of the mind; such activity may well result from systematic training and the methodical application of a certain number of prescripts; nevertheless, the work of art is defined-and defined exclusively by its total liberty." (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 144). For Lévi-Strauss, these

risks reducing works of art to documents of liberty qua spontaneity, thereby undermining any notion of talent or taste, or rather abandoning them to the irrationality of a mystery.

The only interpretation that would avoid such irrationality would distinguish between "the document, the raw product of mental activity, and the work of art, which always involves an element of secondary elaboration", with the proviso that this secondary elaboration be itself also spontaneous and irrational, a form of "irrational intellection" (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 146). Behind this concept lies a conception of art as a specific, if curious, historical achievement: "But it can be supposed that, under certain conditions and among certain people, spontaneous irrational thought may well become conscious of itself and become truly reflective – its being understood that such reflection is carried out in accordance with its own norms, and that these norms are as impermeable to rational analysis as the matter to which they are applied" (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 146). We can recognise here the basis for Lévi-Strauss's further elaboration of art as a reflexive form of wild thought, participating in it while also overcoming it, or more specifically his definition of primitive art and what he calls academic art as inverse of each other.

Breton recognises this "irrational intellection" as the necessary secondary elaboration of spontaneously produced material to turn it into art[3], as well as the centrality and intractability of the contradiction between the work of art as aesthetic object and as document of spontaneity: "Indeed, I find myself pulled in two very different directions (...) The first leads me to search for the pleasure the work of art gives (the word 'pleasure,' which you used, is the only really appropriate word, for when I consider my own reactions, they appear to me as para-erotic). The second, which may or may not manifest itself independently of the first, leads me to interpret the work of art as a function of the general need for knowledge." (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 149). If these two "very different directions" manifest largely together in the appreciation of the work of art, in its production they become indistinguishable, as both primary and secondary elaboration remain "in the preconscious" (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 151).

The real distinction between mediocre texts and poems produced by automatic writing "is that many people find it impossible to place themselves in the conditions necessary for the experience. They are satisfied with a rambling, disconnected discourse which, with its absurdities and sudden shifts in subject-matter, gives them the illusion of success; but the signs are easily detected which suggest that they haven't really "gotten their feet wet," and that their supposed authenticity is a bit of a sham." (Lévi-Strauss 1993: 150). Mediocre art for Breton does not primarily reside in kitsch, but in the union of avant-garde and kitsch, a mimicry of spontaneity that never abandons the clichés and automatism of everyday speech. If Lévi-Strauss would describe later the two-fold danger for art of becoming either "a kind of childish game on the theme of language" or of becoming "entirely a language" (Calasso, 2021: 52), the mediocre artist does both at once.

(An aside on the question of avant-garde and kitsch: By 1939 Clement Greenberg had already published his famous essay on "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" which begins with the paragraph: "One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T. S. Eliot and

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3   Breton had elaborated a materialist theory of the "irrational intellect" in *Communicating Vessels* (1932) combining both Leninist Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis to show the rationality of apparently irrational phenomena such as dreams – or automatic writing. "Irrational intellect" is of course not too far off from Lévi-Strauss's *Wild Thought*.

a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by Braque and a Saturday Evening Post cover. All four are on the order of culture, and ostensibly, parts of the same culture and products of the same society. Here, however, their connection seems to end. A poem by Eliot and a poem by Eddie Guest-what perspective of culture is large enough to enable us to situate them in an enlightening relation to each other?" (Greenberg, 1961: 3). He goes on to define kitsch as "a product of the industrial revolution" and adds: "Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money-not even their time." (Greenberg 1961: 10). In contrast, "the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. "Art for art's sake" and "pure poetry" appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague." (Greenberg, 1961: 5). The essay ends with "Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible... Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture-as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now." (Greenberg, 1961: 21).)

The ship where their conversations took place transported both the political vanguard and the artistic avant-garde of its time, and both Breton and Lévi-Strauss embodied something of their misadventures and tragic (més)alliances in the first half of the 20th century. Lévi-Strauss had first wanted to make a career in politics, specifically with the revisionist SFIO. For instance, his first text on Picasso published in George Bataille's journal *Documents* in 1930 was ghostwritten for politician Georges Monnet. He was also a member of the "Révolution Constructive" group which hoped to remedy the barbarism of the World War with a technocratic planned economy that would make high culture accessible to all. Members of Révolution Constructive were as likely to enthusiastically become the left wing of the fascist Vichy government as to join the Resistance. Neither one nor the other, a disenchanted Lévi-Strauss would later find in UNESCO a more appropriate home for his liberal-technocratic cultural politics (see Pajon, 2011). Breton was himself closer to the Left Opposition, became close to Trotsky, and had co-written with him the Manifesto for a Revolutionary Art in 1938 that demanded "The independence of art – for the revolution. The revolution – for the complete liberation of art!" against the subordination of art to the fascist and sovietic authoritarian states.

This difference manifests in their brief written exchange around the figure of Dalí. Lévi-Strauss had concluded that "there must be the dialectical means to account for [...] the possibility that Picasso is a greater painter than Braque, that Apollinaire is a great poet and Roussel is not, or that Salvador Dali is a great painter but an appalling writer. Judgments of this type, though they may differ from or

be contrary to my own – and the judgments given here are only examples constitute the absolutely necessary conclusion to the dialectic between the poet and the theorist" (Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 147). Breton responds: "I do not consider Dali a great 'painter', for the excellent reason that his technique is manifestly regressive. With Dali, it is truly the man that interests me, and his poetic interpretation of the world. Again, I cannot associate myself with your conclusion (but you already knew this). I have other, more pressing reasons for not accepting it. These reasons, I insist, are of a practical nature (adhesion to the mater. histor.)" ((Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 151). *Mater. histor.*, that is, historical materialism, demands for Breton that "If a loosening of psychological responsibility is necessary to obtain the initial state on which every thing depends, so be it, but afterwards, responsibility, both psychological and moral." (Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 151). Dalí's true artwork was his life, but his reckless fascination for Hitler (and later Franco) meant that for Breton it failed precisely where it succeeded the most.

Lévi-Strauss would then spend almost a decade in New York hanging out with the Surrealists. In a footnote to his appreciation of Picasso over Braque and Apollinaire over Roussel, Lévi-Strauss in 1993 remarks that he owed the Surrealists a broadening of his previously limited and naive aesthetic horizons, although this was certainly mutual. Parts of this broadening manifested around their common fascination for the art of the Salish, the Kwakiutl, the Tlingit, the Haida and the Tsimshian, all peoples who live around Vancouver Island and whose works, collected notably under the direction of Franz Boas, were exhibited in the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He would dedicate one of his last major works, *The Way of Masks*, to an elucidation not just of some of these works, specifically Salish and Kwakiutl masks and myths, but through them of the fascination they held over him in that period. The text itself, like the seven volumes of the *Mythologiques* more generally, is written like a Surrealist collage and reads like a series of nightmares marked with strangely obsessive motifs and bizarre inversions. Yet Lévi-Strauss never abandoned the desire to find a logic to the apparent madness, and in this text in particular a number of social and political logics characteristic of a kinship system on its way to taking the feudal form of inheritable houses.

During that same decade, another Marxist exile, Arnold Hauser, was writing in London a diagnostic of Surrealism that echoes and clarifies that of Lévi-Strauss. For Hauser, Surrealism, like all post-impressionist art, was at root anti-naturalist, but instead of taking refuge in formalism devoted itself to the destruction of all forms in the name of spontaneity. Yet the cost of that cult of spontaneity was a dogmatic reliance on a specific method, automatic writing, whose products ended up even more monotonous than the academic art against which the Surrealists had rebelled (Hauser, 1999: 220). It was at root what Hauser identifies as their Romantic Rousseauism that also led them to look for the salvation of European art in a so-called primitive art they imagined spontaneous. And it is in turn to this supposedly primitive art and its exquisite formal sophistication and complex historicity that Lévi-Strauss and Peter Gow devoted most of their lives. Hauser argued that the modernism of Kafka and Joyce in the 1920s and 1930s attempted to produce "a kaleidoscopic picture of a disintegrated world", and so did Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* for the barbarism and disintegration of the Indigenous societies of North and South America after the conquest, the violent integration in the capitalist world market, and the epidemics that followed them.

Lévi-Strauss's reminiscences of Surrealism's formative influence on his life served to illuminate by contrast the inaccessibility of 18th-century art. If Peter Gow wrote about *piborch* and the difficulties involved in learning to appreciate it, he wrote little about music that had once been much closer to his heart – punk. Pete was 17 in 1975 when Brian McLaren, who had managed the New York Dolls, returned to the UK. He co-owned a clothing store called Sex on King's Road with his partner, Vivianne Westwood. He also managed a little-known band called the Strand until he recruited Johnny Rotten as their frontman and renamed them the Sex Pistols. In 1976, when Peter Gow turned 18, the Sex Pistols released *Anarchy in the UK*, the Clash performed at Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall, to an audience that went on to create The Buzzcocks, Joy Division, The Fall, and The Smiths. This musical transformation came on the heels of the 1973–1974 stock market crash, the largest downturn since the Great Depression – and until the 2007–2008 crash. If surrealism had devoted itself to the destruction of all forms in the name of Romantic spontaneity, punk was its rightful nihilistic heir.

Pete was not a member per se of the punk scene, but lived on its margins. When Juan Pablo Sarmiento, one of Peter Gow's favourite PhD students, bought him a photo album documenting the London scene, Pete could identify people and places. But the aesthetic shock produced by punk was more important than it being a mere context for his intellectual maturation. He introduces punk in *An Amazonian Myth and its History* to explain how he had conceived his initial fieldwork project about the Yine. I have presented the first part of that narrative above to explain Pete's turn to Marxism. He then adds "more importantly, we found this older tradition of anthropology to be boring. That was no small point, for this was the heyday of punk music, and punk music had taught us that boredom was a very reliable guide in the identification of all forms of knowledge that were irrelevant to understanding the world we saw around us and our places within it" (2001: 5).

Yet facing punk the problem is the opposite of that confronted by Pete in the field. Where he wanted to collect tales of oppression and resistance but was faced with kinship and "civilisation", where his aesthetic fascination for designs led him to understand their non-aesthetic nature, the anthropologist trying to make sense of punk is faced everywhere with claims of resistance and anti-musicality. To try to appreciate punk music, unlike developing a taste for *pibroch*, seems absurd not because the genre is devalued (one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious cultural institutions, the British Library, has devoted an exhibition to it), but because as a genre it claims to mock professionalism, education, and taste itself. Accordingly, academics who study punk emphasize its ideological self-representation – the anti-capitalist and anarchist themes of the lyrics and the anti-capitalist form of punk concerts and so on – over the musicality itself.

Punk can be seen as a transformation of folk music and the inheritor of the hippie scene in the post-1974 crisis moment (see Dale, 2020). Like much of the folk music of the 1960s, punk is a protest genre in both form and content. The form opposes the increasingly industrialised production of pop music which, by submitting it to a strict division of labour and to the desiderata of marketing departments, had made it bland. It does so by emphasising a minimalist aesthetic of one singer, one guitar and local scenes, and an aesthetic celebration of the pre-industrial country life. Lyrically, it also often opposed racism and war and promoted the struggles of workers. Punk signals a disillusion with both folk music and

its socialist politics. It kept the localist and minimalist aesthetics but replaced socialism with anarchism and artful analogue melodies with explicitly artless amplified Do-It-Yourself (DIY) sound (Goddard, 2020). Moreover, it inherits the anti-work and pro-sex and drugs ethos of the hippie movement but, in an economic downturn, reveals them to be self-destructive and nihilistic (Mattson, 2019). That the aesthetic experience of punk turned Pete not into an anarchist but a Marxist is a tribute to the nature of aesthetic experience itself: it is not about ascent to propositions about the world, even less to a political program, but rather to help discern the moment, what is living and what is dead in it.

The emergence of punk in London in 1976 was the product of a tightly knit social network of mostly lower middle-class white men from the hippy and art school scene connected to slightly older men with access to money, rehearsal space and connections to the fashion and music industry (Crossley, 2015). In order to reproduce the sounds of live performance, punk records (at least up to the 1990s) required both state-of-the-art recording equipment and expert producers able to make pristinely record-ed instruments sound raw. The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks* was recorded at London's Wessex Studios, an elite recording studio famous for albums by Queen and King Crimson, and by Bill Price, the engineer that recorded had previously worked for the London Symphony Orchestra (Bennett, 2020). Finally, the anti-aesthetics of punk and its celebration of amateurishness has much to do with avant-garde movements of the 1960s, among others Situationism, that questioned the difference between art and everyday life, music and noise (as in John Cage's works). With punk, as with some contemporary art, the aim of the work is to make the audience ask "but is this even art?" (see also Dines, 2020).

A romantic genre *par excellence*, punk has always portrayed itself as Do-It-Yourself and immediate while in fact being as heavily mediated and integrated into a mass production apparatus as the other genres it was competing against. That punk does not (and never did) match the DIY, anti-musical, purely expressive credentials it claims for itself does not mean it has "sold out" but is rather the entry point to making sense of what it is as a musical genre. The art of punk lies precisely in the deliberate attempt to produce an appearance of amateurish immediacy and a spontaneous expression of anger and disillusion-ment through a highly mediated, mass-produced medium and in an administered society where individual behaviour and desires are ever more highly controlled either in the workplace or at the job centre. It becomes even more difficult as the punk aesthetic itself becomes hegemonic and state-sponsored cultural institutions as much as the private culture industry realise that they need "anarchy" to maintain levels of creativity that will foster innovation and productivity (Harvey, 1990; Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999).

Pete may have also encountered punk music in Peru, where he was also initially favourably dis-posed towards the very beginning of Shining Path. Shane Greene (2016) describes the antagonism in the 1980s in Lima between the *subte* – the *subterraneos*, underground punk rockers – and the *subver-sivos*, the Maoist militants of the Shining Path. The *subversivos* would accuse the *subte* of supporting, or even promoting, imperialism by playing a genre imported from the US. They would much rather have had them play Andean music, since not only was it the music of the people, but moreover that of the Incas which they, after Mariategui, took to be proto-communists. The *subte* would reply that the US origins of the form did not imply support for imperialism, since what mattered was the "oppositional spirit of rock" that punk turned against rock itself (Greene, 2016: 29). Perhaps it was that "opposition-

al spirit" that inspired Pete to want to become a Marxist anthropologist, that is, to write a history of the oppression and resistance of Indigenous People. Yet, crucially, the experience of fieldwork quickly made him reconsider this path, as he noticed that in the guise of carrying the voice of the oppressed and resisting capitalism, the glorification of resistance implies a glorification of their oppressor – that, as others describe in this issue, describing Indigenous People as peripheral or marginalised is already adopting the position of the State. Seen from the Urubamba, the *subte* and *subversivos* looked more similar to each other than they imagined.

An anthropology of modernity, then, should show how our interlocutors' pursuit of freedom leads to more unfreedom, and how social theories which purport to protest this fact participate in it. Like the sophisticated sound engineering necessary to make punk sound DIY, like the state-supported anarchism of Sidesporet that forms part and parcel of "positive gentrification", academics actively funded by state institutions brand their scholarship as "anarchist", "decolonial", or even "Marxist". This provides not an end point of disenchantment with thought itself which always would collude with the powerful, condemned to mere resistance in the absence of *hors-texte*, as this despairing anti-intellectualism was precisely what led to post-structuralism in the first place. Rather, these contradictions provide the opportunity for thought to begin anew in the recognition that social theories represent the self-contradictory nature of society in one-sided (or "flat") ways which only become intelligible when brought back to those very social relations they misrepresent. Such an anthropology would deepen those mysteries, showing just how deep they go, rather than papering over them. I take this to have been the import of Peter Gow's approach to Amazonian and Scottish historicity, where both are equally "local" and "abstract" (rather than one encompassing the other), paradoxical (blood is history, common experience forming both the basis for and being antithetical to the abstract History that under the guise of encompassment obliterates it yet may also help remember it), and the relation between the two, which should lead to reconciliation (as we all participate in the same history, ultimately, if history is to mean anything), nevertheless seems irreconcilable. In other words, the problem also runs much deeper than Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* would have us believe.

Peter Gow and Claude Lévi-Strauss's encounters with the crisis of modern art in Surrealism and in punk music were decisive for their anthropological reflection as departure points. Surrealism, which presented itself as art but always threatened to collapse into a mere document of culture, was fascinated with documents of "primitive" cultures which they took to be art. Punk music, which tried to pre-emptively negate the very question of aesthetic judgement as inadequate, and with it the history of music, did so as an expression of the collapse of high-brow conceptual art and of kitsch, pop-music. Surrealism and punk's apparent demand for the communist or anarchist transformation of society would receive a sceptical ascent from Pete and Lévi-Strauss. The encounter with societies that appeared beyond the categories of bourgeois society, such as art or history, heightened their consciousness of bourgeois society's crisis and enticed them to turn to its earlier constitutive moments in the 18th and early 19th century, not to morally or politically condemn these but to further explore this crisis by disciplining themselves to appreciate its art. In doing so they task us to continue the same, even as punk music and Kungfu movies make their way to Amazonian communities (High, 2010), even as these communities

produce artists immediately confronted with the crisis of art – with the added difficulty that academia has become increasingly inhospitable to enquiries that do not immediately lead to economic, social or political impact, that take time to deepen problems instead of dressing up old pseudo-concepts in new garbs. Peter Gow was acutely aware of the problem, and thought that the discipline had perhaps already disappeared. Susan Buck-Morss once wrote that "tomorrow's artists may opt to go underground, much like freemasons of the eighteenth century. They may choose to do their work esoterically, while employed as producers of visual culture" (Buck-Morss, 1996: 29). Pete thought anthropology might have to live on in NGOs and marketing departments.

Graeber and Wengrow's idea that the revolutionary spirit of the European and North American 18th century was inspired by the words of a Kandiaronk, rather than, as they themselves thought at the time, with the coming to consciousness of the third estate, the society of ex-slaves who had emancipated themselves a few centuries before on the basis of free labour, does not just demand a revision of Euro-American history but also a dismissal of the entirety of anthropological thought. Where such a move could appear as provocative in the 1980s, as a liquidation of a "boring" inheritance that had stopped serving the present, it now appears to many as common-sensical – and it echoes the 2021 proclamations of the president of the American Anthropological Association demanding yet another reckoning with the history of anthropology.

The Lévi-Straussian concept of "cold" and "hot" societies here finds all its critical salience. Often mis-represented as a racist dismissal of non-Western societies as lacking in history, it was instead aimed at Western societies' systematic exaggerations of their own histories. For Lévi-Strauss, ethnographic experience could enable us to see that Western societies, while profoundly differently from other societies as those societies among themselves, were not as distant from the Neolithic Revolution as they'd like to imagine. More specifically, in his repeated returns first to what was already "old" anthropological debates about totemism, and then to the particularly obscure Comtian legacy, Lévi-Strauss was questioning the discipline's often self-satisfied narratives of scientific progress. Past debates, he argued, were rarely solved or overcome, but simply bypassed because their difficulty became too overwhelming, only to reappear under different forms. One cannot help but see in the "turns" of the past ten years, to "ontology" and "ethics" or now, apparently, "antiracism", a barely disguised repetition of the solutions provided in the 1980s to the so-called "crisis of representation" – solutions that were themselves inadequate at the time and mere repetitions of structuralism's own solution. Assertions of better politics and ethics only make these new solutions more obscure than those of the past, which were more epistemologically self-conscious.

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BEYOND DECOLONISATION: NAVIGATING THE CRISIS OF EUROPEAN ART AND HISTORY THROUGH AMAZONIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Abstract: Experience, historical, aesthetic and ethnographic, as shifting grounds for knowledge often decried as mere belief, that is, as possibly invented or imagined, is a thread that runs through Peter Gow's entire work. The point he was thereby trying to make had to do with what he considered to be the threat to anthropology's *raison d´être* that had emerged with the so-called "crisis of representation" of the 1980s and only gained further ground thereafter until it had overtaken the entire discipline by the 2010s. Marxism and the 18th century were at the heart of what was being rejected by the post-moderns, and each because of the other. Crucially for Gow, what was being evacuated in the process was perhaps one of the most sophisticated product of both, and one foundational to Amazonian anthropology: Claude Levi-Strauss's synthesis of pre-1950s anthropology (most prominently functionalism, diffusionism and boasian historicism) and a Marxian sense of historical consciousness, anchored in a recognition of the crisis of the Enlightenment in modernity. This article attempts to shed a light on this obscure nexus (art, knowledge and history, Amazonia and Scotland, Marx and the 18th century, with Lévi-Strauss at its heart) which increasingly preoccupied Peter Gow and can help both to understand his work and to understand how it might be furthered in and beyond Amazonia.

Keywords: history; ethnography; Amazonia; Peter Gow.

MÁS ALLÁ DE LA DESCOLONIZACIÓN: NAVEGANDO LA CRISIS DEL ARTE Y LA HISTORIA EUROPEOS A TRAVÉS DE LA ANTROPOLOGÍA AMAZÓNICA

Resumen: La experiencia, histórica, estética y etnográfica, como bases cambiantes del conocimiento a menudo denunciadas como mera creencia, es decir, como algo posiblemente inventado o imaginado, es un hilo que atraviesa toda la obra de Peter Gow. El punto que intentaba destacar estaba relacionado con lo que él consideraba una amenaza para la razón de ser de la antropología, que surgió con la lla-mada "crisis de representación" de los años 80 y que solo ganó más terreno a partir de entonces, hasta apoderarse de toda la disciplina en la década de 2010. El marxismo y el siglo XVIII estaban en el centro de lo que los posmodernos rechazaban, y cada uno debido al otro. De manera crucial para Gow, lo que se estaba abandonando en el proceso era tal vez uno de los productos más sofisticados de ambos, y uno fundamental para la antropología amazónica: la síntesis de Claude Lévi-Strauss de la antropología anterior a la década de 1950 (principalmente el funcionalismo, el difusionismo y el historicismo boasiano) y un sentido marxista de la conciencia histórica, anclado en el reconoci-miento de la crisis de la Ilustración en la modernidad. Este artículo intenta arrojar luz sobre este nexo oscuro (arte, conocimiento e historia, Amazonia y Escocia, Marx y el siglo XVIII, con Lévi-Strauss en su centro), que cada vez preocupaba más a Peter Gow y que puede ayudar tanto a comprender su obra como a entender cómo podría desarrollarse más allá de la Amazonia.

Palabras-clave: historia; etnografía; Amazonia; Peter Gow.

PARA ALÉM DA DESCOLONIZAÇÃO: NAVEGANDO PELA CRISE DA ARTE E DA HISTÓRIA EUROPEIAS ATRAVÉS DA ANTROPOLOGIA AMAZÔNICA

Resumo: A experiência, histórica, estética e etnográfica, como fundamentos mutáveis do conhecimento frequentemente denunciados como mera crença, ou seja, como algo possivelmente inventado ou imaginado, é um fio condutor que atravessa toda a obra de Peter Gow. O ponto que ele tentava destacar estava relacionado ao que ele considerava uma ameaça à razão de ser da antropologia, surgida com a chamada "crise de representação" dos anos 1980 e que apenas ganhou mais força a partir de então, até dominar toda a disciplina na década de 2010. O marxismo e o século XVIII estavam no centro do que os pós-modernos rejeitavam, cada um por causa do outro. Crucial para Gow, o que estava sendo abandonado no processo era talvez um dos produtos mais sofisticados de ambos, e um fundamento da antropologia amazônica: a síntese de Claude Lévi-Strauss da antropologia pré-1950 (mais notavelmente o funcionalismo, o difusionismo e o historicismo boasiano, veja Salmon 2013) e um sentido marxista de consciência histórica, ancorado no reconhecimento da crise do Iluminismo na modernidade. Este artigo tenta lançar luz sobre este nexo obscuro (arte, conhecimento e história, Amazônia e Escócia, Marx e o século XVIII, com Lévi-Strauss no centro), que crescentemente preocupava Peter Gow e que pode ajudar tanto a compreender sua obra quanto a entender como ela pode ser ampliada na e além da Amazônia.

Palavras-chave: história; etnografia; Amazônia; Peter Gow.