

# MANUAL OF ETHNOGRAPHY



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**Marcel Mauss**

Translated by  
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Edited and introduced by  
N.J. Allen



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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Several years ago Bill Pickering of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies in Oxford became convinced that Mauss's *Manuel d'ethnologie* should be translated into English. The reasons will be apparent from the Introduction to this book. The project for such a translation has taken longer to realise than was originally expected, owing to financial and contractual difficulties.

Although the resulting book has been very much a group effort, I was asked to be responsible for the production of the final text. In that capacity I should like to thank most warmly the translator, Dominique Lussier, who, after completing his doctorate at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, undertook the formidable task of wrestling with the long and difficult text.

My thanks are also extended to others, some of whom are not closely associated with the Centre: Jeremy Coote, Paul Dresch, Josep Llobera, Anne de Sales, Nathan Schlanger, Susan Shelton; however, responsibility for defects lies with the editor.

N.J.A.

# Abbreviations and Conventions Used in Notes

AAA	American Anthropological Association
AMNH	American Museum of Natural History
<i>Am. Anth.</i>	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
AS	<i>Année sociologique</i>
ARBAE	Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington)
EPHE	École Pratique des Hautes Études
FMNH	Federal Museum of Natural History
HERE	<i>Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> , Edinburgh, 1908–1926
IAE	<i>Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie</i> , Leiden.
JAI, JRAI	<i>Journal of the (Royal) Anthropological Institute</i>
Jesup	publication associated with the Jesup North Pacific Expedition 1897–1903
JSA	<i>Journal de la Société des Américanistes</i>
Mem.	Memoir(s)
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
SAJS	<i>South African Journal of Science</i>
Smiths. Inst.	Smithsonian Institution
trans.	translated into French from English (if no other source language is given)
U.	University
USNM	United States National Museum
Z. (f.)	<i>Zeitschrift (für)</i>

Numerals following an oblique (/) indicate number, part or fascicle; those following a colon indicate pages. For technical reasons the bibliographies that in the French are appended to the end of some (but not all) chapters are here presented as endnotes at the end of the chapter.



# Introduction

**N.J. Allen**

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) was the leading social anthropologist in Paris between the world wars, and his *Manuel d'ethnographie*, dating from that period, is the longest of all his texts. Despite having had four editions in France,<sup>1</sup> the *Manual* has hitherto been unavailable in English and is seldom cited in the Anglophone literature. This contrasts with his essays, longer and shorter, many of which have long enjoyed the status of classics within anthropology, and some of which (notably *The Gift*) have even transcended disciplinary boundaries.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to think of reasons why the *Manual* has been neglected; for a start, its title might suggest that it is no more than a textbook for ethnographers. However, to see the book in that light would be to misunderstand its place in Mauss's life and oeuvre.

Mauss's apprenticeship into academic life had been supervised by his austere and self-disciplined uncle, Emile Durkheim, who was then (the 1890s) engaged in conceptualising and institutionalising his vision of the discipline of *sociologie* – the science of social facts or social phenomena. Uncle and nephew collaborated closely, both in their own writing and in building up a circle of contributors to their new yearbook, the *Année sociologique*. It was here that Mauss published, not only some substantial and seminal research papers, but also more than 450 reviews of books or articles. The steady development of *sociologie* was rudely interrupted by the Great War, during which many of the younger 'Durkheimians' were killed, and Durkheim himself died.

After demobilisation, Mauss took on the task of carrying forward his uncle's vision. With this in mind he revived a proposal he had made in 1913 and helped to found the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Paris (December 1925).<sup>3</sup> The new science needed facts, lots of them, accurate and well organised, from as many societies as possible, and especially from premodern societies. Those who could or might contribute to collecting them needed advice on how to go about it, and each year Mauss delivered a course of more

than thirty lectures entitled ‘Instructions in descriptive ethnography, intended for travellers, administrators and missionaries’. These lectures form the basis of the *Manual*.

When he lectured, Mauss had some notes in front of him but spoke without reading from them, relying heavily on his encyclopedic memory. By 1935 he had in mind to write up the lectures for publication, but in view of his work habits, his failing health, and the circumstances of the German occupation (Mauss was Jewish), one doubts that he would have done so. Fortunately, however, one of his students, Denise Paulme (later a distinguished Africanist), took shorthand notes of the lectures and produced a typescript, which in a letter of 1943 Mauss claimed to be ‘tidying up’. Since Paulme records that particular sections of the course were specially elaborated in successive years (technology and aesthetics in 1935–36, rural phenomena and finally religion in the next two years), presumably she had to synthesise notes taken from different courses; but this is not clear to me – nor is the process by which the bibliography was compiled.<sup>4</sup> What we can be sure of is that if Mauss had written the *Manual* rather than speaking it, the text would not have been as we now have it, and in particular it would have included the final chapters mentioned in the Plan for the Study of a Society (Chapter 2). Like a number of Mauss’s works, the *Manual* remains unfinished: the lecture series were not completed by the end of the academic year.<sup>5</sup>

The *Manual* does not fall readily under any recognised genre. Is it a textbook? Writing a textbook usually implies summarising a body of established knowledge belonging to a recognised academic discipline – an uncreative activity perhaps, even a commercial one, somewhat set apart from research. Or is it, as Paulme suggests, a questionnaire, like the others listed at the end of Chapter 1? But despite points of contact with both these genres, it is better seen in more personal terms: it is the culmination of a life’s work.

The *Manual* does not cover all of Mauss’s interests – his audience heard nothing of his research on the nation or on Bolshevism, let alone of his moderate left-wing political activism (cooperative societies, journalism, etc.). But it starts off from the foundational Durkheimian vision of a science of social facts (Chapter 1), and draws in most of Mauss’s other papers and those of his Durkheimian friends and colleagues. Obviously too, it draws in, massively, the factual knowledge he acquired as a reviewer. It may be less obvious, though it is stated in the first sentence, that the *Manual* aims to teach not only how to observe social facts but also how to classify them – a long-standing preoccupation that originated in part with the question of how to organise the *Année sociologique*. However, the retrospective and summational aspect should not be overemphasised. The life’s work of a successful academic has to point forward, and the lectures were intended to stimulate and inspire the next generation. Some of the students found them too difficult – the richness of content dizzying, the connections of thought elusive – but the courses were well attended (89 students in 1928–29, 145 five years later), and Mauss the

man was regarded by many with unusual affection and admiration; and among the admirers many went on to make major contributions. Mauss was deeply conscious of scholarship as a collective and cooperative undertaking.

The charismatic impact of the original lectures is inevitably diminished by passage through print, and modern anthropologists, while acknowledging Mauss's erudition and historical significance, will wonder about the relevance of the text today. So much has changed – in the postcolonial world, in anthropology and the culture of academe, and in the situation of fieldworkers with their laptops and internet access. On his first page Mauss claims to be limiting himself to the societies found in the French colonies 'and others of the same stage'; but the world of bounded tribal societies and colonies has more or less vanished. Nevertheless, certain questions remain and will remain, whether or not one has any interest in undertaking ethnography.

One perennial question is: what is a society? Chapter 3 opens with a formal definition, but the implicit answer is more revealing. A society is an entity that exhibits the types of social phenomena treated in the chapters that follow (supplemented by those that should have followed). Mauss's classification of social phenomena may or may not be accepted, but it is carefully thought out, proceeding from more material to less material and more conceptual; it aspires to be complete, and is well supplied with definitions. Moreover, Mauss regretted the abandonment of the unitary Durkheimian conception of *sociologie*, which was in the process of splitting into a sociology that ignored tribal populations and a social anthropology that (at that time) emphasised them.<sup>6</sup> He himself had started out helping his uncle with the statistics for his book on suicide in Europe, and the split between the disciplines made no sense to him – in practice, the *Manual* often ignores it. In any case, we were all once tribals, and no serious student of the social dimension of humanity can ignore them.

Another enduring question concerns the range or variety of societies that humanity has created and experienced. From this point of view, Mauss's period was a good one in which to be working. The scrappy and amateurish quality of much nineteenth-century ethnography was giving way to more professional work, but the quantity of literature was still such that a person of Mauss's intellectual ability was able to gain familiarity with a good proportion of it.<sup>7</sup> The *Manual* refers occasionally to colonialism (probably less than would now seem appropriate), but the corrosive effects of globalisation on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world were still relatively limited. Since Mauss's day ethnographic literature has naturally become not only more voluminous, but also in general more sophisticated (for instance, in its emphatic recognition of the inevitable element of subjectivity that is involved), but it is debatable whether it has brought to light significant dimensions of cultural difference that escaped Mauss's attention. In telling his students what to look for, Mauss was at the same time telling us how rich and how varied 'simple' societies really are.

Above all, however, Mauss is demonstrating to us how he thinks about social facts: he is exhibiting an adventurous and well-supplied anthropological

curiosity at work. Although his range of insights cannot be reduced to a single formula, the central preoccupation is perhaps with categories and classifications<sup>8</sup> – not, for instance, with causes, individual motives or adaptive advantage. Members of society think things and do things, and we need to know what sort of things these are. Thus, at some time and place, people swim in a particular way or adopt a particular posture while awake but resting. Mauss was pleased when he understood that these were techniques – ones that used not tools or machines but the body itself – and should be classified alongside other techniques. Similarly, the fortifications of Marrakesh are simply ‘a huge piece of sun-dried pottery’ (p. 34). But the taxonomic aspect of Mauss’s curiosity should not be oversimplified, as if every ethnographic observation belonged under a single heading. The essence of a fieldworker’s task may lie in weighing up how much religious value is superimposed on a technical act (p. 160).

It may seem odd, at least within the contemporary Anglophone world, that instruction for ethnographic fieldwork should be given by someone who, though he often drew on personal observations of the life around him, never carried out anything resembling sustained fieldwork. But it is not clear that a writer of ethnography is necessarily better equipped to write a manual than is a reader of ethnography. If Mauss had done fieldwork, no doubt he would have given more space to the epistemological and methodological problems of extracting ‘facts’ from ethnographic experiences. On the other hand, he would have had less time to assimilate the fieldwork done by others and would have risked overemphasising the idiosyncrasies of one particular region. In principle, as Mauss shows, anthropologists can think themselves into a variety of geographically remote cultures just as historians can into temporally remote ones. Indeed he constantly passes from the one to the other and back again – here is another disciplinary divide that he treated as insignificant. One should remember that his first teaching job was as a Sanskritist, giving courses on early Indian religions including Vedanta and Yoga.

This brings up another reason why the *Manual* has not been translated sooner, namely the demands it makes on both reader and translator. Some of the difficulties arise from its original orality, which has had various effects – among them the stylistic awkwardness of passages in ordinary prose alternating with list-like nouns or noun phrases. Another is represented by occasional mishearings or misunderstandings, e.g. the meaningless *cinécisme* in place of *synécisme* (p. 22). But difficulties also arise from the density of the thought (there are passages where the argument is far from easy, for instance in the chapter on aesthetics), and from Mauss’s polymathy. These problems come on top of ordinary translation problems such as semantic mismatches between French and English (e.g. *juridique* – legal or jural, *oral* – oral or verbal), and what if anything to do about male-biased language or outdated ethnonyms. Where it seems appropriate, I have addressed such problems by inserting glosses or footnotes in square brackets, but it is a matter of judgment how far to go along that path.<sup>9</sup> Overall, the text remains something of a challenge.

The *Manual* can be read in many ways – as a textbook, a questionnaire, an epitome of the anthropological understanding of one of the best minds to have studied the subject. It is also, of course, a historical document reflecting the state of knowledge sixty-five years ago: I leave it to readers, including students, to reflect on the gap between then and now. Finally, however, the *Manual* is a classic, a contribution to thought about human society and one that continues to provoke and inspire. The careful reader will find many little gems. For instance, one to savour is: ‘The fieldworker should make a practice of systematically rupturing all the divisions that I am expounding here from a didactic point of view’ (p. 181).

N.J.A.

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## Notes

1. 1947 (211 pp.); 1967 and 1989 (264 pp.); 2002 (362 pp., the text used by the translator). An electronic version can be found at [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/mauss\\_marcel/manuel\\_ethnographie/manuel\\_ethnographie.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/mauss_marcel/manuel_ethnographie/manuel_ethnographie.html); the 1926 date given on its coverpage is erroneous.
2. The bibliography relating to Mauss is selectively reviewed in James and Allen (1998: 248–251). Recent English translations are Mauss (2003), (2005), and (2006). Cf. also Tarot (1999) and (2003), Mergy (2004) and Fournier and Marcel (2004).
3. The following remarks are based on the biography by Fournier (1994: see esp. pp. 502–512, 548, 596–606, 724, 749), and the prefatory material by Paulme in the printed French editions of the *Manual*.
4. Notes made by three other students have been preserved but apparently have never been used. The bibliography was attributed to Paulme by Cohen (1947–48), but presumably she was helped by Mauss.

5. The likely content of the missing chapters is suggested by Mauss's articles cited in Chapter 2, note 2. Moreover, some of the existing content might have been revised. During the period 1942–44, influenced by Leenhardt and Granet, Mauss was still rethinking the relationship between mana and totemism, and the nature of clans (Métais 1947).
6. The fact that the secondary literature on Mauss has been dominated by non-anthropologists has contributed to the relative neglect of the *Manual*.
7. I have not found in Mauss's work any reference to Russian-language ethnography (despite the implication of Evans-Pritchard 1954: viii). Of the bibliographic entries in the *Manual* some 30% are in French, 45% in English, 20% in German, 2% in Dutch, plus the occasional rarity (one in Spanish, a few in Latin). Exact figures would have little meaning, but the total number of references is of the order of 650. The book that is cited most often is *Gens de la grande terre*, by M. Leenhardt, co-founder of the Institute of Ethnology.
8. Allen (2000) elaborates on this point and tries to develop some of Mauss's lesser-known insights.
9. I have called attention to factual errors that I noticed, but have not searched for them; and similarly, I have made some improvements in the bibliography, but without checking every item. I have retained Mauss's paragraphing, judging it to be deliberate and meaningful.

# 1

## Preliminary Remarks

The course of lectures published here mainly seeks to address practical questions; it is meant to teach how to *observe* and classify social phenomena.

One might see in these lectures simply an accumulation of useless details. But in fact, each of the details mentioned here presupposes a whole world of studies. Thus biometry, seeking to establish the curve of age distribution, presupposes statistics and probability theory; the study of colours requires, together with some knowledge of physics, familiarity with the Chevreul and Broca scales. What may appear to be futile detail is in fact a digest of principles.

The field of study here is limited to societies inhabiting the French colonies and to societies of the same level – which seems to exclude all the so-called *primitive* societies.<sup>1</sup>

Within these limits, we shall provide the instructions that are necessary to compile in scientific fashion the archives of these more or less archaic societies.

The purpose of ethnology as a science is the observation of societies; its aim is the knowledge of social facts. It creates a record of those facts and, when appropriate, establishes their statistical pattern; it publishes documents offering the greatest possible certainty. The ethnographer must strive for exactness and thoroughness; he or she must have a sense of the facts and of the relations between them, a sense of proportions and articulations.

Intuition plays no part whatever in the science of ethnology, which is a science of facts and statistics. Sociology and descriptive ethnology require one to be at once an archivist, a historian, a statistician ... as well as a novelist able to evoke the life of a whole society. It is not that intuition on the one hand, and theory on the other, are useless here. But their use must be restricted; one must know their value and their dangers.

The true role of theory is to inspire research aimed at testing its claims. Science has its fashions, which change, but which make it possible to understand the facts. Theory possesses a 'heuristic' value, a value as prompting discovery. The false *a priori*s of the Vienna School have served to produce a rich harvest of facts.

The young ethnographer embarking upon fieldwork must be aware of what he or she knows already, in order to bring to light what is not yet known.

Social facts are first of all historical; they therefore cannot be reversed and cannot be rejected – for example, the flight of an army (How many soldiers? What have they done? The role of the leaders, of the men, etc.). Furthermore, a social phenomenon is simultaneously a phenomenon of facts and ideals, of rules. In the Sèvres factory, nine vases out of ten are discarded; elsewhere, ten pieces out of ten are retained. In this latter case, there is no longer any difference between the fact and the norm.

Statistics enable us to reach a degree of certainty that the discipline of history has never yet known. We don't know the number of slaves in Rome, but we know how many there are in Timbuktu.

Let me add that ethnography is not a historical science in the true sense, in that the facts do not present themselves in chronological order. Ethnology nonetheless includes a historical component, which will consist in establishing the history of human settlement: Negro race, yellow race, etc. Currently, ethnology is only in a position to reconstruct such history within narrow limits; but our science has no future unless we keep to a method that is reliable and prudent.

In fact, comparative ethnography will be valuable only if it is based on comparison between facts, not between cultures. Only the criterion of the archaeological fact, embedded in the strata of the soil, will give a value to criteria that are cultural, linguistic, etc. For instance, the existence of the panpipe everywhere around the Pacific (cultural criterion) only allows one to affirm the existence of a community of civilisation in that it is backed up by discoveries of ceramics (archaeological criterion). It then becomes legitimate to state that the whole periphery of the Pacific, like the whole periphery of the Mediterranean, has participated in a single civilisation.

## Difficulties of Ethnographic Investigation

*Subjective* difficulties. The danger of superficial observation. Do not 'believe'. Do not believe you know because you have seen, and do not make moral judgements. Do not be astonished. Do not lose your temper. Try to live in, and as a member of, the indigenous society. Choose your evidence carefully. Be wary of *lingue franche*, pidgin French, English, etc. (disadvantages of the use of words like fetish, tom-tom, etc.). Many specific terms remain untranslatable. If you must have recourse to interpreters, use the philological method as much as possible, and have the phrase itself written down without using a conventional system. A good example is provided by the work of Callaway on the Amazulu.<sup>2</sup> This method produces raw documents that can be worked over at leisure in a study.

There remain the *material* difficulties, to be overcome in the following ways:



- 1) By calling on informants who are well aware of the topic and have a good memory of events; these can be found among legal or religious officials, priests, fetish owners, heralds, and the like.
- 2) By collecting and cataloguing objects. In a great many cases, objects are proof of social facts. A catalogue of charms is one of the best methods to draw up a catalogue of rites.

## **Principles of Observation**

Objectivity is the goal in the written account as well as in observation. Say what you know, all that you know and only what you know. Avoid hypotheses, whether historical or of any other kind, which are useless and often dangerous.

A good method of working is the philological method, which consists in first of all gathering tales, collecting the variants (an example is the first edition of Grimm's fairy tales); then the traditions specific to each village, each clan and each family. The task is often enormous and very complex. Note the studies already carried out, those which remain uncompleted, and all the difficulties concerning the individuals involved.

*Exhaustiveness.* No detail can be neglected (for example: while studying the preparation of a magic potion, note the conditions under which each magic herb is picked). Not only must everything be described, but this must be followed by in-depth analysis, which will reveal the quality of the observer and his or her sociological insight. Study lexicography, the relations between noun classes and objects, jural phenomena, heraldic animals, etc. To the list of ritual prohibitions add examples of casuistic decisions concerning these prohibitions.

In the account of the observations one strives for clarity and sobriety. Plans, diagrams and statistics may with advantage replace several pages of text. For kinship, present family trees, together with the kinship terms. Write at length only while producing evidence; bring in multiple testimonies, and do not be afraid either of telling anecdotes or explaining in detail the trouble taken in order to make observations. Every fact mentioned must always be localised (give the name of the village, family and individual observed) and dated. Give all the circumstances surrounding the observation, unless the observer has spent a long period in the area.<sup>3</sup>

## **Notes**

1. Only the Australian aborigines and the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego should be counted as genuine primitives. The Negroes are at the same stage as the one at which Tacitus observed the Germans. People living in the forests of Cameroon and Congo have a bow which is said to be most primitive; in fact, it is not a tool, but a machine, one presupposing a stage that is already quite advanced. The M'oi of Annam [in Central Vietnam] are archaic and proto-historic. The whole of Northern Asia has a great civilisation, Eskimoid and Mongoloid.

2. Callaway, H., *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, London and Cape Town, 1870.
3. **General Presentations.** Bastian, A., *Die Culturländer des alten Amerika*, Berlin, 1878–89, 3 vols. Boas, F., *Handbook of American Indian Languages* ... Washington, 1911–12; *The Mind of Primitive Man*, New York, 1911. Buschan, G., *Illustrierte Völkerkunde* ... Stuttgart, 1922–26. (Vol. 1: Amerika, Afrika; vol. 2: Australien und Ozeanien; vol. 3: Europa). Deniker, J., *Les races et les peuples de la terre*, 2nd ed, Paris, 1926 (retains its value). Goldenweiser, A.A., *Early Civilisation, an Introduction to Anthropology*, New York, 1922 (a good book). Graebner, F., *Methode der Ethnologie*, Heidelberg, 1910; 'Ethnologie' in G. von Schwalbe and E. Fischer (eds), *Anthropologie*, Leipzig, 1923. Haddon, A.C., *Les races humaines et leur répartition géographique*, revised and corrected by the author, trans. A. van Gennep, Paris, 1927. Kroeber, A.L., *Anthropology*, New York and London, 1923. Lowie, R.H., *Traité de sociologie primitive*, trans., Paris, 1935; *Manuel d'anthropologie culturelle*, trans., Paris, 1936. Marett, R.R., *Anthropology*, London, 1914. Montandon, G., *L'Ologénèse culturelle*, Paris, 1928 (a book to be used with caution). Powell, J.W., 'Sociology, or the Science of Institutions', *Am. Anth.* 1, 1899: 475–509, 695–745. Preuss, K.Th., *Lehrbuch der Völkerkunde*, Stuttgart, 1937. Ratzel, F., *Völkerkunde*, Leipzig, 1885–1890 ('inimitable', but lacks references and seldom indicates sources). Schurtz, H., *Völkerkunde*, Leipzig, Vienna, 1903. Thurnwald, R., *Die menschliche Gesellschaft in ihren ethno-soziologischen Grundlagen*, 3 vols., Berlin and Leipzig, 1931 (the three volumes are fairly accurate, tabulating material for each group of a civilisation; good ideas, in difficult German). Tylor, E.B., 'Anthropology' in 14th edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Separate edition: *Primitive Culture*, London, 1921. Vierkandt, A., *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*, Stuttgart, 1931. Waitz, T., *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Leipzig, 1877. Wundt, W., *Völkerpsychologie*, Leipzig, 1900–09. Wissler, C., *Man and Culture*, London and New York, 1923.

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## Methods of Observation

The method of extensive fieldwork, consisting in seeing as many people as possible within a given area and time, was widely practised at the period when all that mattered was to collect as fast as possible the largest possible number of objects that were likely to disappear, and to stock the museums that had just been created.

The extensive method in many cases makes it possible to identify a location where a more intensive study can be carried out later; qualified travellers can, in the course of a large-scale survey, decide which tribes are to be selected for a return visit. The great danger of such a method lies in its superficiality. The ethnographer is only passing through, and the objects have often been assembled prior to his or her arrival. Another danger, for example, is the use of inadequate linguistic criteria; the drawing of a good linguistic map, necessary as it is, is dependent on the progress that needs to be made in the study of every non-European language.

Undertaking extensive ethnography is necessary, but do not think it is sufficient. The professional ethnographer will certainly prefer to practise the intensive method.

*Intensive* ethnography consists in the detailed observation of a tribe; the observation should be as complete and as thorough as possible, omitting nothing. A professional ethnographer working really well can, by himself, in the space of three or four years, carry out the more or less exhaustive study of a tribe. The study of the Zuñi alone, to which Cushing and also the Stevensons gave their lives, consists of seven quarto volumes from the Bureau of American Ethnology. This work, which is extraordinarily dense, is still not enough.<sup>1</sup>

The instructions in the present book are intended for administrators or colonists who lack professional training. Instructions of the 'working knowledge' type, they should make it possible to carry out work intermediate between an extensive and intensive study of a target population – a study which respects the proportions of the various social phenomena.

Ethnographic studies too often look like caricatures. A student with an interest in museography will effectively neglect everything apart from material

culture. Another, specialising in religious studies, will only notice cults, shrines and magic. A third will only observe social organisation, and will only talk of clans and totems. And yet another will only look for economic phenomena.

Above all the observer must respect the proportions of the various social phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2.1** Plan for the study of a society

I. Social morphology	Demography Demography Human geography Technomorphology
II. [Social] Physiology	Techniques Aesthetics Economics Law Religion Sciences
III. General phenomena	Language National phenomena International phenomena Collective ethology

I. *Social morphology*. Every society is first of all composed of an aggregate. The study of the society as human aggregate and of its distribution across territory constitutes what is called social morphology, which includes *demography* and *human geography*, the importance of which seems to be fundamental. Human geography is supplemented by *Technomorphology*.

II. *Social physiology* studies phenomena in themselves and in their movements – no longer as the material aggregate on its physical substrate. Under this heading, according to their degree of materiality, I include *techniques*, that is to say all the productive arts and crafts without exception: war is the art of destroying; it is an industry or a technique. Techniques culminate in *sciences*; there is no ‘primitive’ society completely lacking in sciences. *Aesthetics* still remains quite material, even when it seems very much a matter of the ideal. Three-dimensional esthetics differs little from techniques. Progressively less material, yet governed by collective representations – very clear ones – *economics* offers, by way of disengagement from materiality, the currency that is found all across America and Africa. Above economics and ruling over it is *law*, which consists of jural and moral phenomena. Higher still are *religion* and *science*, the latter recurring at this level.

III. *General phenomena*. After *language* come morphological phenomena (for example, society in general), *national phenomena* (permeability of the tribe), and then *international phenomena*:<sup>3</sup> nomadism presupposes that a society can go and pasture its sheep in territory that does not belong to it, or can take them across foreign tribes, which in turn implies international peace, often over considerable distances. Civilisation is an international phenomenon. The study

of civilisational phenomena comprises the study of the internationalisation of certain customs and certain tools. Finally come general phenomena proper, or *collective ethology*, the study of national character or national political psychology and their relations with psychological phenomena and biological phenomena (for example, the relation between cleanliness and mortality – or non-mortality).

The present book contains a certain number of museographic instructions in the context of social morphology on the one hand, and technique and esthetics on the other. The inventory of economic, legal and religious objects will complete the plan of a museographic study, which is contained implicitly in these pages. The museography of a society consists in establishing its material archives: museums are archives.

## Methods of Observation

Ideally, an expedition should not set out without its geologist, botanist and ethnographers. This would reduce general expenses. On the other hand, a biological anthropologist can show himself to be a sociologist, and anyone can be a first-rate museographer. So, set out *as a group*.

One will often find local people who are very well informed about the indigenous society: missionaries, settlers, non-commissioned officers, not necessarily French, who generally live in far closer contact with the natives than do the high-class French. This is how the Roman Empire was formed, thanks to centurions living with Gauls.

The first working method is to start a *fieldwork diary*, in which the work done during the day should be written up each evening: cards filled out and objects collected should be entered in this diary, which will become an easily consultable catalogue.

The fieldworker should draw up an *inventory* as progress is made in assembling the collection. In addition, each object collected should have its detailed *descriptive card*, in duplicate. Fieldwork diary, inventory and cards are the first components of the study.

For many travellers, the essence of the ethnographic work will consist in assembling and organising collections of objects. This is part of museography, which includes also the methods of conserving and exhibiting these objects. All studies of diffusion pointing towards civilisational strata are still usually classified under museography.

As a branch of descriptive ethnography, museography records the products of a civilisation – all its products, in all their forms. Creating collections of objects is important both practically and theoretically. Practically: collections are central to knowledge of a country's economy; more than any other type of study, technology can put us on the track of industries. Show the ingenuity of invention, and the type of ingenuity you observe. The theoretical importance

comes from the presence of instruments typical of a particular type of civilisation. Museum collections remain the only means for writing [their] history.

The collector should attempt to construct logical series, assembling if possible all the varieties of a single object in terms of size, form, etc., without being afraid of duplicates or triplicates. Localisation is absolutely mandatory; without it, the object cannot find a place in any museum. Identify the area over which the collected object is in use.

Each object should be labelled with a number, written in ink, referring to an inventory and to a descriptive card providing information on the use and manufacture of the object. The descriptive card should be accompanied by several annexes, in particular a photographic annexe and, if possible, a film annexe. A drawing should be attached whenever it is necessary to show how the object is manipulated, or the associated movements of hand or foot (for example: for a bow and arrow, it is important to determine the method of shooting in terms of the position of arms and fingers at various moments; likewise, a loom is incomprehensible without documentation of how it works). Furthermore, one should note with utmost precision the period of use, since certain objects have a seasonal existence (one does not use scateurs in winter). Moreover, an object may be used only by men, or only by women. Finally, one should try to explain objects whose value is not only technical, but religious or magical; such and such a decoration may correspond to a mark of ownership, or a trademark, etc.

The drawing of distribution maps should be undertaken only towards the end of the investigation, preferably on a return trip, when it is felt that everything has been seen. It is the culmination of a study and not a method in itself. But the fieldworker can set himself a similar objective in the course of his work, for instance if he visits successively two fractions of a single society.<sup>4</sup> To achieve such a goal presupposes that one has observed all of the tribe's objects. Thus Professor Maunier, using statistics, has been able to establish that the canon for the Kabyle roof is Greek rather than Latin.<sup>5</sup>

The inventory method, used for building up collections of objects, is itself only one of the means of material observation used in the study of social morphology.

Methods of observation are divided into material methods of recording and observing objects on the one hand, and moral methods of observing and recording on the other. The distinction is rather arbitrary, since social life includes neither purely material elements nor purely moral elements. Music – the art of the ideal and impalpable – also acts upon people in a most physical way.

Material methods of observation include the following:

### *Morphological and Cartographic Method*

The first point in the study of a society is to know who one is talking about. To this end, produce a thorough mapping of the society under scrutiny, which is

often a difficult task: a society always occupies a given territory, which is not the territory of the neighbouring society. Note carefully all the locations where you have witnessed the presence of individuals belonging to the group being studied, with the number of locations and the number of inhabitants living in each, and all this for the different moments of the year. No good sociological enquiry can cover less than one year. The mapping of a society is the mapping of its content. It is not enough to know that a particular tribe numbers two or three thousand; each individual of the three thousand must be located. For this purpose the method to use is census-taking in relation to a map: make an inventory of the people in each place, the number of houses in each village, the number of huts and granaries; map these granaries and houses. An extended family in the Sudan is generally a joint family, living around a courtyard; a clan lives in one ward of a settlement. In this way one can see high-level social structures appearing immediately in material form. If possible, use aerial photography.

Geographic and demographic statistics are indispensable and form the foundation of any work. The dwelling of each extended family and of each of the clans constituting the society can thus be discriminated. At this point one can draw up the inventory of each house and each sanctuary, from foundations to rooftop. This was how M. Leenhardt discovered the totem in the rooftop of the Kanak hut.

The inventory should be complete, with exact localisation by age, sex and class. The inventory method includes the precise mapping of each place where objects are gathered: plans of houses and, where relevant, plans of storeys. The material recording thus obtained will form the essential basis of all other work.

For this recording of material culture, one should again employ the photographic method and the phonographic method.

### *Photographic Method*

All objects must be photographed, preferably without arranging them artificially. Telephotography will make it possible to capture significant *ensembles*. Do not use the same equipment in warm countries and in cold countries, nor the same films; and in principle, develop the films as soon as possible.

One can never take too many photographs, provided they are all supplied with a commentary and precise localisation: time, place, distance. These data should appear both on the film and in the diary.

Motion pictures will allow photographing life. Do not forget stereo vision. Dramatic performances have been filmed in Liberia, and the transhumance of entire tribes in the Algerian Aurès.

Phonographic recording and motion picture recording with sound allow us to observe the moral world as it enters into the purely material world. So let us now move on to the problem of moral recording.