**Lévy-Brühl, Lucien (1857-1939)**

Lucien Lévy-Brühl was a French philosopher who taught philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1899 to 1927. Investigating the psychology of ‘primitive’ societies, his book *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés primitives* (1910) made a distinguished contribution to the study of archaic religion and mythology, shaping the budding discipline of anthropology. Lévy-Brühl’s interest in irrational as well as mystical forms of engagement with the world – thought to be characteristic of ‘primitive’ societies – inflected subsequent research towards a pluralistic and relativistic sociology. Elaborating the controversial notion of ‘primitive mentality’ in *La mentalité primitive* (1922), he posited a distinctively non-logical mode of thinking governed by a mystical ‘law of participation’, which caused the subject to experience the world as one, in a manner that overrode Western dichotomies and collapsed logical distinctions. An acquaintance of Sigmund Freud, Lévy-Brühl provided a generation of artists and writers with privileged access to irrational – if not wholly unconscious – schemes of thought. For many, such ‘primitivism’ held the keys to escape a rigidly logical Western mindset. While T. S. Eliot gained first-hand knowledge of Lévy-Brühl’s writings, surrealist circles seized his formulation of the ‘law of participation’ as model for their ‘ethnographic surrealism’, adopting his views on magic as a form of mystical experience.

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