



The places of Lévi-Strauss

public lecture given by **Francesco Remotti**

on the occasion of the 2010 Landscape Study Days on *The concept of place*
dedicated to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009)

Friday 5th February, 9 pm

auditorium of palazzo Bomben, Treviso, via Cornarotta 7a

Human existence is inevitably linked to places, and thought too - as indeed culture in general - takes shape in relation to the experience of specific places. What are the places which helped shape Claude Lévi-Strauss's reflections on anthropology? To answer this question we must trace the fundamental moments of his life and thought. First there are the places associated with his travels and with his ethnographical fieldwork in Brazil. Of the various peoples he encountered it was perhaps the Bororo who above all taught Lévi-Strauss the sense of spatial organization (the structure of "cold" societies). But his return to Europe brought Lévi-Strauss into contact with a continent shot through with anti-semitism and sliding quickly towards the Second World War: a "hot" society, which had lost its sense of structure and from which, like many other Jewish intellectuals, Lévi-Strauss was forced to flee. The third turning point came with Lévi-Strauss's stay in New York: it was there that he developed his anthropological thought at a theoretical level and laid the basis for his structuralism; and it is there that we can picture Lévi-Strauss wandering around the streets of the metropolis (like the *flâneur* imagined by Walter Benjamin). For the fourth place we have to refer to his stay in India and the pages of *Tristes Tropiques*, which are dedicated to the crowds in Indian cities and which return to the theme of societies devastated by historical movements and subjected to the laws of ruinous entropy. It was in the disorder of the Indian cities (the "replete" tropics as opposed to the "empty" tropics of indigenous America) that Lévi-Strauss glimpsed the distressing future of humanity.

(*Francesco Remotti*, January 2010)

Francesco Remotti is Professor of Cultural Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Turin. Starting in 1976 he conducted ethnographical research among the BaNande people of North Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo) and has carried out ethno-historical studies of the pre-colonial kingdoms of Equatorial Africa. He has also developed several lines of theoretical interest on the meaning of anthropology, on the question of identity and on the themes of anthropopoiesis. His more important publications include: *Noi, primitivi. Lo specchio dell'antropologia* (Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1990; new ed. 2009); *Etnografia nande I, II, III* (Il Segnalibro, Turin 1993, 1994, 1996); *Luoghi e corpi. Antropologia dello spazio, del tempo e del potere* (Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1993); *Contro l'identità* (Laterza, Rome-Bari 1996); *Prima lezione di antropologia* (Laterza, Rome-Bari 2000); *Forme di umanità* (Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2002); *Centri di potere. Capitali e città nell'Africa precoloniale* (Trauben, Turin 2005); *Contro natura. Una lettera al Papa* (Laterza, Rome-Bari 2008).