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COPERNICUS AMONG THE SAVAGES
INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM

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> "On disoit à Socrates que quelqu'un ne s'estoit aucunement amendé en son voyage: Je croy bien, dit-il, il s'estoit emporté avecques soy".
> [Someone said to Socrates that a certain man had grown no better in his travels. "I should think not", he said. "He took himself along with him"].
>
> Montaigne, *Essays*, I, XXXIX

La société contre l'État, published by Pierre Clastres in 1974,[1] is a collection of articles that appeared in various journals over the course of a decade, between 1962 and 1973, to which the author added a previously unpublished final essay, which takes the title of the book to signal its role as an overall synthesis. The book is subtitled *Recherches d'anthropologie politique*, as its aim was to contribute to the formulation of a new political anthropology, focusing on the dimension of power – an aspect that, according to Clastres, had been underinvestigated by ethnology and social anthropology.

Indeed, that the political organization of primitive societies was a long-neglected topic is a judgement made at the time by Georges Balandier, a distinguished Africanist and professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, who in his *Anthropologie Politique*, published in 1967, considered political anthropology "a late specialisation of anthropological research". Balandier noted that it was not until the 1920s that the first studies explicitly dedicated to political anthropology appeared: 1927 saw *The Origin of the State* by the American anthropologist Robert Lowie (an important influence on Clastres), but the real, albeit still limited, establishment of

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[1] P. Clastres, *La Société contre* l'Etat was translated in English in 1989 with the title: *Society against the State. Essays in Political Anthropology*. In this introduction the quotes from Clastres' book are from this English translation.

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political anthropology started with the Africanist studies of the British anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard in the 1940s, in particular his examination of the Nuer political system (*The Nuer. A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, published in 1940) and the 1945 collection, *African Political Systems*, that he and Meyer Fortes edited. Outside the Africanist sphere, Balandier's main reference was to Englishman Edmund Leach's work on Burma (*Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 1954). Among recent works dedicated to Amerindian societies, Balandier referred specifically to Clastres' contribution, in particular to his 1962 essay, "Échange et pouvoir: philosophie de la chefferie indienne". With his research, Clastres offered a contribution that was recognized, then as now, fifty years after the book's publication, as revolutionary, but which has never ceased to arouse controversy: it poses the question of the political in primitive societies, the problem he addressed in the hope that ethnology could become "a general theory … of society and history", in the theoretical furrow opened by Claude Lévi-Strauss. The backdrop to the book is in fact anthropological thought in France centering on Claude Lévi-Strauss, of whom Clastres was a pupil and by whom he was influenced. In 1960, Lévi-Strauss had founded the *Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale* at the Collège de France, and in 1962 published perhaps his most important book, *La pensée sauvage*. In a 1965 essay, "Entre silence et dialogue", published in the literary journal *L'Arc* in an issue devoted to the great French anthropologist, Clastres writes that if dialogue between primitive cultures and western culture was still possible, it was ethnology that made it possible: but not classical ethnology, which set the rational against the irrational, in a self-defeating rejection of dialogue, but another ethnology that can go beyond opposition. Lévi-Strauss's work, writes Clastres, embodies this new ethnology, and it is notably in *La pensée sauvage* that the division between the rational and the irrational as a criterion for classifying thought is overcome, paving the way to an ethnology that enters into dialogue with primitive thought, i.e., with "the other". Clastres' work moved away from his mentor's structural analysis. This departure meant that he did not address structuralism's main concerns, mythology and kinship. As Clastres remarked in an interview with the journal *Anti-mythes* in 1974:

> I am not a structuralist. But not because I have anything against structuralism, it is that I deal, as an ethnologist, with fields that I believe have nothing to do with structural analysis … I deal … with political anthropology, with the question of *chefferie* [chiefdom] and power, and I have the impression that structuralism does not work here: it pertains to another type of analysis (Clastres, *Entretien avec l'Anti-Mythes*, Paris: Sens&Tonka, 2012).

Second, it should be emphasized that Clastres finds a shortcoming in structural analysis: it does not, he claims, speak of society. In one of his last essays, "Les marxistes et leur anthropologie", published posthumously in *Libre* in 1978, Clastres asks why Marxism, which he considered an "obscurantist" methodology when applied to primitive societies (Clastres' critique expressly targets the French Marxist anthropologists Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux) had become so important in anthropological research. Aside from the fact that Marxism by its very nature considers all types of society, the answer, he finds, lies in the weaknesses of structural anthropology:

> What structuralist discourse obliterates, what such discourse cannot speak of, … is the concrete primitive society, how it works, its internal dynamics, its economy and its politics.

Though an "elegant and fascinating discourse", structuralism is "silent about society". It is to remedy this shortcoming that Clastres' project for political anthropology had its start, and in pursuing it, he was to find himself disputing his former teacher's precepts. *La Société contre l'état* was the first fundamental result of this project.

In 1974, when the book was published, Pierre Clastres was 40 years old – he was born in May 1934 – and was *Chargé de cours* at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris (from 1971-1972). Shortly afterwards, in October 1975, he was appointed *directeur d'études* of "Religions et sociétés de l'Amérique du Sud". He had studied philosophy and obtained a *Licence* in Philosophy in 1957 and a *DESS* (Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées) in 1958, before turning to anthropology towards the end of the 1950s. In this, he was influenced by reading Lévi-Strauss (as well as Marcel Mauss, Louis Dumont, Karl Polanyi and American anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Robert Lowie), an interest he shared with his fellow students and friends Alfred Adler (1934-), Michel Cartry (1931-2008) and Lucien Sebag (1933-1965), who also went on to become important anthropologists. With them he attended lectures and seminars by Lévi-Strauss (who was outlining *La pensée sauvage* in his lectures at the Collège de France at the time) and Alfred Métraux, professor of ethnology of South American Indians at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, a central figure in sparking Clastres' interest in Indian America. Clastres began to study Amerindian ethnology in the monumental *Handbook of South-American Indians*. Consisting of a series of volumes published by the Smithsonian Institution between 1940 and 1947, the *Handbook* was edited by the American anthropologist Julian Stewards with the collaboration of a large number of anthropologists from all over the world, including Métraux, who had a leading role in its planning

and writing. In this period, another major influence on Clastres came from the writings of chroniclers (early travelers, often men of religion) and philosophers from the 16th to the 18th centuries: Jean de Léry, Andrè de Thévet, Hans Staden, Yves d'Évreux and Claude d'Abbeville among the chroniclers (whom Clastres considered an exceptionally rich source of insights); Étienne de La Boétie and Michel de Montaigne (who had drawn on the texts of these early chroniclers); Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau among the philosophers – an interest Clastres shared with his masters Lévi-Strauss and Métraux. Clastres maintained an ongoing dialog with these philosophers, and in 1976 wrote an essay entitled "Liberté, malencontre, innomable" on La Boétie and his *Discours sur la servitude volontaire* (1576). We can thus consider Clastres not only as an anthropologist but also, and above all with time, as a political philosopher who like those great thinkers is aware of the perhaps unbridgeable distance separating civilized and savage peoples but nevertheless sees glimmerings of possible dialogue. Clastres' work is thus an attempt both to carry out ethnographic research (in Latin America) and a philosophical-political reflection along the path of skeptical and Enlightenment thought trodden by Lévi-Strauss. In 1963, Clastres began fieldwork in Latin America. In that year he set off on his first one-year journey among the Guayaki Indians of Paraguay, with the help of Métraux and the local support of the Paraguayan ethnologist Léon Cadogan. His wife Hélène (whom he had married in 1958) and Lucien Sebag also worked with him in Paraguay. Here he started the research that formed the basis of his doctoral dissertation, *La vie sociale d'une tribu nomade: les indiens Guayaki du Paraguay*, written under the supervision of Lévi-Strauss, and defended in 1965, as well as several articles and the book *Chroniques des Indiens Guayaki* in 1972. Between 1965 and 1968, he visited the Guaraní and Chulupi Indians of Paraguay, as well as giving courses at the University of Sao Paulo, and between 1970 and 1971 he stayed among the Yanomami of Venezuela together with Jacques Lizot.

In 1974, Clastres published *La société contre l'État* (Society against the State). His reflections on political anthropology continued with the writings published in *Libre*, the journal he founded with Michel Abensour, Cornelius Castoriadis, Marcel Gauchet, Claude Lefort and Maurice Luciani in 1977, the year of his death: "Archéologie de la violence" and "Malheur du guerrier sauvage", fundamental writings on war in primitive societies that also strongly influenced the subsequent debate. Clastres' post-1974 writings were collected in the book *Recherches d'anthropologie politique* published in 1980.

The eleven chapters of *La société contre l'État* are ordered by theme rather than chronologically. The first three chapters and the last are the theoretical framework of Clastres' political anthropology, defining the

"space of the *political*" in primitive societies. The first chapter "Copernic et les sauvages", originally published in 1969, serves as an introduction and announces the theoretical program. "Can serious questions regarding power be asked?", Clastres begins, in a bid to overcome the ethnocentric view that, he argues, had long been prevalent in anthropology, and which saw primitive societies as "lacking" something: "people without faith, king or law", as was said the time of the first European explorations in America. The second chapter, "Échange et pouvoir: Philosophie de la chefferie indienne", originally published in 1962, before Clastres' fieldwork, contains the essence of the political theory of the savages, i.e., the status of the political in primitive societies. The third chapter, "Indépendence et Exogamie", originally published in 1963, briefly but effectively addresses the question of the dynamism of primitive societies, emphasizing that – contrary to the traditional interpretation – their structure is diachronic. The last chapter, "La société contre l'état", takes stock of the research Clastres had conducted up to that point over a twelve-year period and reviews open questions. The other chapters deal with different dimensions of Amerindian peoples' social organization and ways of thinking, complementing and supplementing the central theoretical corpus.

Clastres' argument starts from a critical examination of the ethnocentric view that sees primitive societies as lacking or deficient in dimensions and aspects that will only later emerge in historical evolution and be fully expressed in modern Western societies. This view's traditional criteria of archaism ascribed to primitive societies include the absence of writing and the subsistence economy. While the former can be considered a simple fact, Clastres writes, the latter implies the idea that primitive societies are in a situation of material misery, barely managing to survive in an endless struggle against starvation. This reflects a notion that gained ground in the 18th century with the "theory of four stages" which holds that the key factor in society's historical development is the mode of subsistence and that society progresses through four stages: hunting, herding, agriculture and trade, the first of which is what Adam Smith, one of the main proponents of the theory of stages, called the "early and rude state of society",[2] a society of misery due to a lack of division of labor, i.e., low productivity. This notion attributes primitive societies' misery to the inability to produce a surplus beyond the bare minimum necessary for survival because of technological and institutional deficiency. This persistent idea of the subsistence economy, Clastres claims, "belongs to the

[2] On this subject see Meek 1976, and Marchionatti 2023. See also Marchionatti and Cedrini 2017.

ideological purview of the modern West and not at all to the conceptual store of a science" (Clastres 1989: 14), and is false, because, as the then-recent ethnographic research showed (Clastres refers to Marshall Sahlins's *Stone Age Economics*, for which he wrote the preface to the 1976 French edition, translated as *Âge de pierre, âge d'abondance*)[3] – confirming many observations by the first Europeans arriving in the Americas – "primitive societies have at their disposal, if they so desire, all the time necessary to increase the production of material goods" (*ibid.*: 195). Moreover, Clastres emphasizes, there is occasional production of surplus in such societies, but this surplus is consumed for political purposes, at festive occasions, visits by outsiders, etc., as shown by the famous analyses of anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski, which form the basis of Marcel Mauss's classic *Essai sur le don*. Primitive societies can be called "the first leisure societies, the first affluent societies, according to M. Sahlins' [*sic*] apt and playful expression" (*ibid.*: 196), Clastres comments. He asks: "why would the men living in those societies want to work and produce more, given that three or four hours of peaceful activity suffice to meet the needs of the group"? (*ibid.*: 195). And he replies: "Men work more than their needs require only when forced to" (*ibid.*), but, he points out, that very force is absent from the primitive world: "the absence of that external force … defines the nature of primitive society" (*ibid.*). In primitive societies, economic life is not autonomous, but is a dimension of the "total social fact" (taking up the concept used by Mauss in his *Essai sur le don*): this dimension is constituted as an autonomous sphere only when the external force that is the power to compel, i.e., political power, makes its appearance in the social body, when the egalitarian rule of exchange which constitutes the "civil code" of primitive society, the "primitive social contract", gives way to "the terror of debt" (*ibid.*: 198). Then work becomes alienated labor: under such conditions man produces without exchange and without reciprocity. "The political relation of power", Clastres points out in clear polemic with the Marxists, "precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation" (*ibid.*: 198). He can thus argue, reversing the traditional Marxian structure-superstructure relationship that "the economic infrastructure is not necessarily 'reflected' in its corollary, the political superstructure, since the latter appears to be independent of its material base" (*ibid.*: 202). Clastres continues: "It is the Political break that is decisive, and not the economic transformation":

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[3] On Marshall Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* see the symposium "Marshall Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics*" (Cedrini and Marchionatti 2021).

[t]he true revolution in man's protohistory is not the Neolithic, since it may very well leave the previously existing social organization intact; it is the political revolution, that mysterious emergence – irreversible, fatal to primitive societies – of the thing we know by the name of the State.

And if one wants to preserve the Marxist concepts of infrastructure and superstructure, then perhaps one must acknowledge that the infrastructure is the political, and the superstructure is the economic (*ibid.*).

Having made this premise, Clastres can pose the question of the political in primitive societies: a central problem in understanding those societies, to define a "general theory" of primitive society. Political anthropology, he maintains, must answer two overarching questions: what is political power? How and why do we move from non-coercive to coercive political power? Clastres still considers it impossible to determine the conditions in which the state emerges, and he devotes only a few final remarks to this fundamental problem. What the book mainly does is to specify "the conditions of its non-emergence" (*ibid.*: 205), i.e., "to delineate the space of the political in societies without a State" (*ibid.*). First, Clastres refutes the ethnocentric axiom that coercion sets the bounds of power, or, as he states:

(1) Societies cannot be divided into two groups: societies with power and societies without power. On the contrary, it is our view … that political power is *universal*, immanent to social reality … and that it manifests itself in two primary modes: coercive power, and non-coercive power.

(2) Political power as coercion … is not the *only* model of true power, but simply a *particular case*, a concrete realization of political power in some cultures …

(3) Even in societies in which the political institution is absent …, *even there* the political is present, even there the question of power is posed: not in the misleading sense of wanting to account for an impossible absence, but in the contrary sense whereby, perhaps mysteriously, *something exists within the absence*" (*ibid.*, pp. 22-23).

The second chapter, "Échange et pouvoir: Philosophie de la chefferie indienne", formulates the political theory of savages, i.e., the status of the political in primitive societies. Focusing on the forest peoples of South America, Clastres notes that the majority of Amerindian societies, despite their great diversity, "are distinguished by their sense of democracy and taste for equality" (*ibid.*: 28): indeed, the lack of social stratification and authority of power are, he asserts, the distinguishing feature of their political organization. To a Western mind, the particular status of Amerindian chieftainship seems "paradoxical": "what is this power that is deprived of its own exercise"? (*ibid.*: 29). What we need to understand, then, is the

persistence of a power that is practically powerless, of "a chieftainship without authority" (*ibid.*), that fact that astonished the Europeans who first came into contact with those peoples. Clastres quotes Robert Lowie's three essential traits of such chieftainship: the chief is a peacemaker, obliged to be generous, and a good orator. To these qualities, Clastres adds polygyny, an almost exclusive privilege of the chief. "Apparently", he writes – referring to Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of the question of power using Mauss's categories – "power is faithful to the law of exchange which founds and regulates society" (*ibid.*: 38): "it seems as if the chief received a part of the group's women in exchange for economic goods and linguistic signs" (*ibid.*). However, Clastres considers this interpretation, "based on the impression that the principle of reciprocity determines the relationship between power and society", to be "lacking" (*ibid.*). Such an exchange, he argues, is in reality "unequal" (*ibid.*: 39): in fact, daily harangues by the chief and a few economic goods are not adequate compensation for a considerable quantity of the group's most essential values – the women – and could only be explained by the existence of effective authority, which is what is lacking. In reality, this exchange between the chief and society does not follow the rule of reciprocity: power is, Clastres points out, a rejection of reciprocity as the ontological dimension of society. Power is therefore rejected outside of society. And this ejection of the political function from society is the very means of reducing it to "powerlessness". The rationality immanent in the negation of power lies in the fact that "it is culture itself, as nature's absolute difference, that becomes totally invested in the rejection of this power": "culture apprehends power as the very resurgence of nature" (*ibid.*: 44). Primitive societies, Clastres writes, *have a premonition* that "power's transcendence conceals a mortal risk for the group" and that "the principle of an authority which is external and the creator of its own legality is a challenge to culture itself" (*ibid.*), a regression to the natural hierarchical state. And "the culture asserts the predominance of what it is based on – exchange – precisely by treating power as the negation of that foundation" (*ibid.*: 46). In this way, by grasping the depths of savage political philosophy, Clastres' political anthropology completely overturns the Western ethnocentric perspective through what he calls the Copernican "heliocentric conversion" that political anthropology needed, along the path blazed by Lévi-Strauss.

In the second part of the concluding chapter, Clastres addresses his second fundamental question, the problem of the State's emergence, how the undivided primitive society could be divided into dominant and dominated:

> Primitive societies are societies without a State because for them the State is impossible. And yet all civilized peoples were first primitives: what made it so that the State ceased to be impossible? … What tremendous event, what revolution, allowed the figure of the Despot, of he who gives orders to those who obey, to emerge? *Where does political power come from*? (*ibid.*: 205).

Denying that there could be of a progressive, seamless transition from primitive chieftainship to the state machine, because "[t]he space of the chieftainship is not the locus of power" (*ibid.*: 206), while acknowledging that there is a constant risk that the chief will overstep his bounds, Clastres tackles a case that, at first glance, appears to cast doubt on whether separate political power is indeed impossible in a primitive society: the case of the Tupi-Guarani of the southern Amazon. At the time they were discovered by Europeans, the Tupi-Guarani seemed to depart from the primitive model due to their high demographic density ratio and the size of the local groups, which was well above that of the neighboring populations, and the tendency of chieftainships to acquire increasing power. However, Clastres denies that this could be a case of a primitive society where a state would have begun to emerge had the Europeans not arrived:

> [I]t was not the arrival of the Westerners that put a stop to the eventual emergence of the State among the Tupi-Guarani, but rather an awakening of society itself to its own nature as primitive society, an awakening, an uprising that was directed against the chieftainship in a sense, if not explicitly… (*ibid.*: 214-215).

Clastres refers to the phenomenon of prophetism in the 15th and 16th centuries (previously studied by Métraux and then also by Hèléne Clastres, in the seminal *La terre sans mal: le prophétisme tupi-guarani*, 1975) – the preaching of the prophets, the *karai*, who invited the Indians to abandon everything to seek the "Land without Evil", leading to a massive religious migration. Clastres' interpretation of this phenomenon is entirely different from the traditional view that it was messianism, the effect of the shock caused by the Europeans' arrival. But this, Clastres argues, was not possible, because it was a phenomenon that pre-existed the conquest. The *Karai* preached that the source of evil and unhappiness is the One, and people followed them in search of the non-One, the Good. In the religious migration Clastres sees the rejection of the path to which the chieftainship was committing primitive society, and of the One as the State, a "'political' reading of a metaphysical intuition" ("the metaphysical proposition that equates Evil with the One" (*ibid.*: 217)). Chiefs versus prophets, armed only with their *logos*, but able "to bring about a 'mobilization' of the Indians …, to accomplish that impossible thing in primitive society: to unify, in the religious migration, the multifarious variety of the tribes" (*ibid.*:

217-218), thus paradoxically realizing the chiefs' program. "Might this be the place where power originated?", Clastres asks. Perhaps, although in this experience the primitives make us witness "the continual effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs" (*ibid.*: 218). Clastres puts forward this hypothesis on the origin of the state cautiously, but later rejects it. The difficulty, if not the impossibility of political power in a primitive society, is thus fundamentally reaffirmed. Clastres addresses the origin of the state on several occasions: in the preface to Sahlins's book, in *Mythes et rites d'Amérique du Sud*, in "Archéologie de la violence" and in "Malheur du guerrier sauvage", always recognizing primitive society's ingrained ability to block the process of state creation. The only possible explanation, Clastres concluded in the 1976 essay "Liberté, Malencontre, innomable", dedicated to Etienne de La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontarie*, is, then, the *malencontre*, the tragic accident, fatal rupture, irrational event. From this perspective *à la* La Boétie, the appearance of the state is not a historical necessity but a *malencontre*, inexplicable and unnecessary – note that in the idea of the origin of the state and of history as a tragic rupture Clastres joins such giants of Western thought as Friedrich Nietzsche in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Genealogy of Morals) and Walter Benjamin in "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" (On the Concept of History).

Clastres' book aroused lively debate in ethnological, sociological and philosophical circles when it appeared. While some saw in it simply a new version of the notion of the Noble Savage and a kind of "anarcho-primitivism", and criticized what was called a reductive dualism between society without a state and society of the state, effectively rejecting the thesis of "society against the state", most readers welcomed it as an important and in many respects revolutionary contribution. The first phase of interest in Clastres' work culminated with the volume *L'Esprit des lois sauvages. Pierre Clastres ou une nouvelle anthropologie politique* (Seuil, 1987), edited by one of the French intellectuals closest to Clastres, the philosopher Miguel Abensour, who joined him in founding the journal *Libre*. This was followed by years of substantial oblivion interrupted by the resurgence of interest that began at the turn of the new millennium. Since then, his works have been reissued and his thinking reevaluated, drawing attention to its philosophical and political topicality. In November 2009, for example, Miguel Abensour coordinated a conference entitled *Pierre Clastres et nous. La révolution copernicienne et la question de l'État* in collaboration with UNESCO, some of whose presentations were collected in *Cahier Pierre Clastres*, published in 2011 by Sens&Tonka and edited by Abensour and Anne Kupiec. Though this resurgence of interest first centered in France and Latin America, it has gradually spread internationally in the fields of anthropology, political philosophy and political science. Two recent contributions by James

C. Scott and Viveiros De Castro stand out as particularly noteworthy. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* discusses the strategies that the highland peoples of Southeast Asia have historically employed to reject state power: Scott acknowledges an enormous intellectual debt to Clastres' work, which he says has "come … to seem clairvoyant" as a kind of Latin American counterpart to his findings in Asia. The work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Brazilian anthropologist and leading figure in Americanist ethnology, author of the now famous *Métaphysiques cannibales: Lignes d'anthropologie post-structurale*, published in 2009, which, in a perspective that, starting with Lévi-Strauss, defines the mission of anthropology as that of becoming "the theory/practice of a permanent decolonization of thought", devoted a major essay to Clastres that appeared as an afterword entitled *O intempestivo, ainda* (The Untimely, Again) to the 2011 Brazilian edition of *Archeologie de la violence* (published in English in 2010, and then in French as a stand-alone book in 2019). Reaffirming the validity of the concept of "society against the state", De Castro considers Clastres' work as "more a radicalization than a rejection of structuralism" (Viveiros de Castro 2010: 13) whereby he articulates the Lévi-Straussian concept of cold society in political anthropology:

> his primitive societies are Lévi-Strauss' cold societies; they are against the State for exactly the same reasons that they are against history. In both cases, incidentally, what they are seeking to conjure keeps threatening to invade them from the outside or erupt from the inside; this was a problem that Clastres, and Lévi-Strauss in his own way, never ceased to confront (*ibid.*: 13-14).

We must "take Clastres seriously", this could be said to be the conclusion of these new reflections. In this recent literature, the long-criticized thesis of "society against the state" finds the central place it deserves at the heart of political anthropological research, and at the same time beyond its boundaries in philosophy and politics. It forces us to "take the other, the savage, seriously", constructing a non-ethnocentric image of him, and to question the genealogy of coercive power, as did Montaigne and La Boétie. In this connection, Philippe Descola's *La Composition des Mondes* (2014: 54) tells us:

> Pour la premiere fois, depuis Montaigne peut-etre, on ne prenait pas pour modéle, afin de penser le politique … des institutions et des concepts issus de l'histoire européenne, mais des modes d'organisation du vivre qui n'avait pas leur equivalent en Occident et à qui une dignité philosophique et morale était ainsi restituée.
>
> (For the first time in a long period, since Montaigne perhaps, it was not institutions and concepts of European history that were being used as models for thinking the

political …, but organizational models of living together that had no equivalent in the West and whose philosophical and moral dignity was thus restored).

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This symposium hosted by the *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* includes both invited articles by leading scholars and papers from the call the *Annals* launched on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the publication of Clastres' *La Société contre l'État*. They show that, as Viveiros de Castro wrote, re-reading Clastres today is "a disorienting and an illuminating experience". In fact, contributions here offer evidence not only of the interest that Clastres' work excited and excites today in scholars, but also of the fertility of his challenging way of reasoning.

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