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ORIENTALISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY
From Max Müller to Louis Dumont

Jackie ASSAYAG
Roland LARDINOIS, Denis VIDAL

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NOTE

This Pondy Paper in Social Sciences was first published in 1997 and has had great success. A lot of people still ask for papers of which we have run out in the French Institute.

Because of this demand, we have decided to make a reprint in 2001. This new edition is strictly the same version as the first one. We hope this reprint will give satisfaction for those who are eagerly waiting to read these papers.

Dr. Patrice COHEN
Head of the Department of Social Sciences

INTRODUCTION

ORIENTALISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Jackie ASSAYAG

The Frenchman Raymond Schwab has given India its place in the construction of Oriental imaginary. This pioneer demonstrated in an erudite work, *La Renaissance orientale* (1950), to which extent the discovery of the learned culture of the Hindus had both fostered and rendered extravagant the avant-garde and melancholic thought of European Romanticism, including its symbolic or decadent metamorphoses, in essays, poetry and novels, as well as on theatre stages.

It was, however, not until the incisive book by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), that the study of literature, the arts and social sciences was seen to be inscribed in the framework of the European colonial adventure and enterprise. It is true that his focus concerned only the Arab world and the Middle East. However, his argumentative arsenal progressively reached out to assail more distant regions of the Orient, including that of South Asia. Since then, the battle lines have been drawn: the potent Occident was historically constituted by transforming the Other, inferior and dangerous, into the emasculated Orient which was needed to legitimate its imperialist design.

A considerable number of works have gone down this hypercritical and reflexive, not to say Manichaean, path, works bearing on the relations between the West and the "rest", with varying success and subtlety (G.C. Spivak 1988, 1990;

A.K. Bhabha 1990, 1994; N.D. Dirks 1992; A. Ahmad 1992; G. Prakash 1994, 1995). A recent collective work vigorously testifies to this, *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament* (Breckenridge & van der Veer 1993), offering much more than its title would give one to expect. Along the lines of Bernard Cohn (1987; 1996), who undertook to make an inventory of all the modalities through which British discourse produced various forms of knowledge: investigations, censuses, museography, legal codes, etc., one examines with greater depth the ways in which the colonial administration constructed a knowledge of Indian society and culture which were, in fact, fashioned by it. But also, and above all, one learns that colonialism persists today, such is the difficulty which Indians and foreigners have in thinking of India in terms which would not be orientalist in nature. Also bearing witness to this are the works of an anthropologist from the subcontinent who has assimilated the academic field to a fictive space by entitling his book *Imagining India* (1990). At the same time, he repudiates his earlier standpoints. An intention of this work was to break down the solid disciplinary objects which, for many years, caste, village, the Indian spirit and divine kingship had constituted. Ronald Inden, for it to his work we refer, preceded this "deconstructionist" attack with an article, "Orientalist Constructions of India" (1986), in which he brilliantly signalled the major stages of the categorial reification of India—a subcontinent continually transformed in essence, according to Inden, since the Age of Enlightenment.

Notwithstanding excesses, factual errors and the technique of anachronism initially employed by Edward Said—who was criticized on this account by James Clifford (1988), Aijaz Ahmad (1991), and many others (Sprinker 1992)—his work engendered a project which, on the long term, has proved salutary: that of re-thinking the problem of the construction of the Other, in disciplines of fiction, as in the field of social sciences. This project Edward Said himself continues to foster by integrating Africa, India, the Far East, Australia, the Caribbean and the most contemporary actuality, in his latest work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Today, many bemoan the deleterious effects on the research into these turbulent "deconstructionist" or "post-orientalist" undertakings without, however, really knowing which meanings are to be ascribed to these terms; the word "post modernism" is meaningless, so you have to use it very often... Let us grant that "deconstructionism", applied to "orientalism", leads to the foundation of a "post-modernism" which renews that which it denounces insofar as it accords sovereign power to the text by selecting the events and the practices upon which they are based. Who, in effect, could deny that henceforward the conventional rhetoric of "discourse", of "discursiveness", "narrative" and of "power"—evidently mixed with or contrasted to (Gramscian) "hegemony"—has often borne similarity to a septic bacillus? French intellectual tradition is without doubt well placed to

recognize this, in as much as the jargoning groundswell is readily supplied by indigenous authors: Derrida, Lyotard, Bourdieu or Foucault. Their native readers encounter, however, some difficulty in recognizing them in the "post-structuralist" amalgam, since which time they have crossed the Channel and the Atlantic, where they are to be found enlisted in the battalions of textual demolishers of neo-colonialism—armchair decolonizers! It will suffice to recall Michel Foucault's unkind remark qualifying the work of Jacques Derrida: "[...] historically determined minor pedagogy" which "lends the voice of masters an unlimited sovereignty, allowing him to indefinitely re-tell the text" (1972: 602). What is more, it is well-known 'at home' that these gurus occupy distinct, if not contradictory, positions of authority in the regional field of the *homo academicus*, to employ the characteristic terminology of one of them. However, post-colonialism is obliging: who could legitimately forbid anyone to appropriate imported products as one deems fit? Thus, it is a question of scale and distance.

To wish to recognize in this effervescence only vain excitement fostered by post-modern illusion does not, however, do justice to the profuse imagination of contemporary social sciences. Also, nothing serves to combat such a pervasive logorrhoea: anything undertaken against it, said Friedrich Nietzsche, is insignificant. It would be better to take note of this renewal of perspectives and inquiries in order to assess the reconfiguration of the old domain designated by the antiquated, but today very fashionable, term "orientalism". Is this not, after all, in "the nature of normal science", as the epistemologist Thomas Kuhn (1983) wrote, as any contributor to evolving science must know. For, from the sustained effort of Indianists since the 1970s, Anglo-Saxons as well as Europeans, but, let us stress, above all of Indians, a profusion of knowledge has resulted which, by shifting the emphasis of problems open to research, and the criteria according to which specialists decide upon what is to constitute a problem or solution, defies the preservation of pre-existing paradigms.

One possibility which exists for countering the "post-orientalist" surge consists in reducing the scale of observation of studies, which, moreover, are concerned to render the problems complex, through an attentive exploration of details, of juxtapositions, of unanticipated short-circuits and unforeseen links. Underscoring argumentative or rhetorical procedures, new paths may be opened for appraising orientalism and anthropology in their interwoven destinies, which are to be subjected to rigorous periodization.

To contribute to the realization of this task is the intention of this small work, *Orientalism and Anthropology*, a title which can be read as a chiasmus, and by which should be understood: an orientalism reappraised by a resolutely plural anthropology. The purpose of the three texts included in this volume is to cast light

on the extent to which orientalism is founded on anthropology, and conversely—each author doing so in his own manner: ironic as regards Denis Vidal, Bourdieusian in the case of Roland Lardinois, turbulent as for Jackie Assayag. Max Müller and Louis Dumont were, of course, only the standard-bearers of a disciplinary tendency which developed over a lengthy period: a tendency manifested by the will to capture an essential, not to say, fundamental, India.

The relevance of the studies in this volume is fourfold. First, it is shown that the works of French-speaking researchers in India have not been devoted exclusively to research done "in the field", which one might be led to believe, although these examples are chosen at random, by the list of *Pondy Papers in Social Sciences*, the titles of the principal scientific journal devoted in France to the thematic of South Asia— *Purusārtha* —, or the recent monographs by two of the contributors to this volume (Vidal 1995; Assayag 1995) and the investigations regarding the family carried out by the third (Lardinois 1986). It should be emphasized that it is through the will to remain continually in proximity of the "field" that researchers avoid becoming "armchair decolonizers".

This volume thus at least enables one to recall that there is indeed a critical tradition of the Dumontian model in France, where the work has, in effect, been the dominant, if not exclusive, paradigm, not only for the study of the subcontinent, but also for the presentation of the comparative method of the culturist type. The model, moreover, is still employed by a few isolated Indianists who, disregarding disciplinary transformations, indifferent to new objects of study, little acquainted with other than French-language bibliographies, weary themselves in fashioning something new from what is old through presumptuous, but pitiable, conceptual patch-work (Herrenschmidt 1996). Rare are epigones who honour their masters, as is abundantly known.

In the English-speaking countries, the major work, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1967), had also served as a model, but in the manner of a foil. Consider, for example, the elaboration of "ethno-sociology" by the Chicago School, patronized by McKim Marriott (1989), today reduced to the exploration of the facets of a (magical) cube endowed with the capacity to explain Indian society as a whole. The equivocal privilege of the Dumontian model 'made in America' persists today: the last work of the anthropologist Mattison Mines (1994), entirely devoted to the exploration of Tamil culture (and that of South Asia—the work wittingly upholds this ambiguity—), adopts an opposing course and conception of India, antithetical to the comparative method of Louis Dumont, by demonstrating that individualism does, in fact, exist in India. It is, however, an individualism which does not eclipse collective identities and which owes nothing to the model of the renouncer. An ambitious work which opposes those whom it refers to as "the merchant[s] of the

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exotic", whether academic or not. Decidedly, one is always the orientalist of the other!

The texts comprising this volume also take a cultural view of history. It is a question, particularly for English-speaking readers little acquainted with the ideological history of France between the two World Wars, of calling to mind a few unnoticed, forgotten or overshadowed intellectual references which, nevertheless, were determinant in the construction of an "object" which one is increasingly less inclined to term scientific. The India of the French academic tradition has certainly not been comparable to that of British and American and, *a fortiori*, of Indian, traditions. Regional anthropologies of the different nations do not correspond; they have their own academic traditions, their privileged regions of study and their preferred tools, if it is not a recognizable construction among many. They are also manifestations of "imagined communities", as Benedict Anderson has defined nations (1983).

Finally, these texts affirm how heuristic is to cross rather then preserve them on the basis of a single paradigm. the boundaries between disciplines or faculties, literary genres or inspired tropisms. However cursorily one examines the conceptual tools and intellectual constructions elaborated in time and taught according to circumstances, the boundaries appear more fluid than one would have thought. Understanding is not closed to imagination, and imagination often lends ardour to understanding.

That is to say, these texts wish to restore to imagination the potency of its meaning. This also pertains to symbolic constructions which are intellectual undertakings, even, and above all, if they have similarities to "Gothic architectures", to employ the equivocal praise which Edmund Leach (1970) addressed to Claude Lévi-Strauss; British traditional empiricism thus takes hold of the intellectualism of researchers on the continent. Such a study has already been put forward for works of fiction (Weinberger-Thomas 1988, Lombard 1993). As for theoretic productions, the field still lies by and large fallow. It is hoped that the perspective offered by these three texts will help to elucidate, by individual cases, the limits between indology and the social sciences. Let us also hope that they will serve to illustrate the strength of what the most Greek of all French philosophers, Cornélius Castoriadis (1975), has called "the imaginary institution of society".

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MAX MÜLLER AND THE THEOSOPHISTS
or the other half of Victorian Orientalism

Denis VIDAL

"India, what can it teach us?"
F. Max Müller (1879)

It is not a recent phenomenon; it doesn't originate either in Edward Said's famous book on orientalism (1978). It seems that sanskritists have always, for sheer pleasure perhaps, indulged in the art of getting into trouble with their readers. To begin with, as Raymond Schwab has shown (1950), the West's initial infatuation with Indian culture, in the eighteenth and then in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was often due to rather fanciful readings of texts that were themselves inaccurate and incomplete. And when this infatuation gave way to denigration—as was the case in England in the nineteenth century—the works of sanskritists were used once again. Macaulay, for instance, whose certain but questionable gifts as a polemist led him to improvise judgments on Indian culture for which he was never forgiven, never claimed any first-hand knowledge in the matter. On the contrary, he declared that he had based his opinions entirely on extensive reading of the work of orientalists.

Mention must be made, of course, of the particularly harmful interpretations that were based on the analysis of Aryan or Indo-European themes, especially in Germany. But we should also take into account the manner in which the texts of the orientalists contributed to the undeniable wave of popularity of Indian mysticism and spiritualism. A complete anthology could be put together with quotes from unfortunate erudites, specialists in Indian literature or religion, who desperately tried to draw a dividing line between their scholarly books and all sorts of other books, dealing with oriental themes, that bookstores perversely insist on stacking on the same shelf.

It is probably difficult to find a single Sanskritist who hasn't faced the same dilemma as Max Muller. He thought that the only readers who could really understand his work were the researchers working in the same field. They alone were in a position to realise, for example, that all the contemporary translations of

the Vedas were fairly provisional and vastly speculative. He even regretted at times the Middle Ages when he could have quenched his thirst for knowledge, while remaining a mere transcriber of texts.

Still, Müller, perhaps more than anyone else in the nineteenth century, made accessible works that were then only known through oral traditions, scattered manuscripts or rare scholarly studies. We will later see how Max Müller, thinking of himself more in terms of a new Erasmus than of a medieval transcriber, liked to imagine his new readers. One thing is nevertheless clear: they were not the people who came to be most influenced by his works. Raymond Schwab's only remark on the subject would still be considered as ample commentary by most sanskritists "The other new fact, on which I will not have to dwell, is the appearance, also in 1875, of the Theosophical Society with Madame Blavatsky" (Schwab, 1950, 17)

And yet, in the West, two very different types of people embody orientalism during the Victorian age which is also the heyday of British Imperialism in India.

The first group is well known; it is composed of people who created the academic tradition of orientalism in Europe. I will confine the present study to the works of a single man, who could legitimately be considered the most exemplary, if not always the most innovative, representative of these scholars: Max Müller, Professor at Oxford, editor and promoter of a monumental series of fifty one volumes entitled: *The Sacred Books of the East*. He was also the author of the first critical edition of the Vedas and wrote more than fifty other books devoted, on the whole, to Indian culture and civilisation. He had the 'honour' to be made, towards the end of his life, Privy Counsellor to Queen Victoria .

The second group that I will examine, though it is undoubtedly as important as the first, is absent from most debates on orientalism: it is exemplified by the theosophist movement and especially by two fascinating people, be it for very different reasons: Helena Petrovska Blavatsky (H.P.B. for those in the know), author of works whose merits Jorge Luis Borge would certainly have appreciated (*Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*), and Annie Besant, perhaps the most exceptional radical militant of the entire Victorian age.

1. THE TWO SIDES OF ORIENTALISM

It has become commonplace to consider orientalism as a particularly spectacular form of cultural imperialism. Edward Said's work dealt more specifically with the Middle East (Said, 1978) but his theses were extended to India, especially by Ronald Inden (1990). However, as David Ludden recently remarked, we must first clarify the meaning and the scope of the term "orientalism" (Ludden, 1994, 252). This question is particularly important for the period I am dealing with. Indeed, one of the remarkable features of Indian orientalism in the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century is that Edward Said's definitions cannot account for it.

Let us use a simple example: when he mentions the forms taken by orientalism in India in the nineteenth century, Said tends to refer to the famous texts by Macaulay where he denigrates Indian culture. It is fairly ironic to see how Edward Said quotes him. Whereas the Englishman undoubtedly voiced the theses of Western cultural imperialism in the most perfect rhetorical form, one can wonder whether his stand can really be defined as a form of orientalism. It is well known, on the contrary, that he tried to suppress all forms of orientalist influence on colonial ideology.

If we examine the meaning that the terms had at the time, one thing at least is certain: not only did Macaulay have nothing in common with orientalists, but he was their fiercest enemy, as well as, perhaps, the man who did most to prevent the identification of orientalism with colonial ideology. Indeed, from 1835 onwards, when Bentinck, then Governor-General of India, decided to ratify the recommendations contained in his famous *Minute on Education*, an ever-widening gap was created between orientalism—in the sense that this term had at the time—and the kind of cultural imperialism defended in a sophisticated manner by authors like Mill, Macaulay or Trevelyan. This form of imperialism was echoed by the entire colonial ideology of the time, but in a cruder manner[1].

We are therefore first faced with a terminological problem: depending on whether we use the term orientalism with its nineteenth century meaning or whether we give it all the connotations that it carries today with Said or Inden, we will in fact be referring to two entirely different things. And if we agree at first to think in nineneteenth century terms, we can see that the form of cultural imperialism which dominated colonial ideology had practically nothing in common with what was then referred to as orientalism. It was practically the opposite. Does this mean that we should exonerate orientalism from the charge of imperialism? Certainly not, but I think that the problem must be stated differently.

Let us consider Max Müller: it is indeed difficult to find a more peaceful defender of all forms of imperialism existing at the time, in Europe as well as in the rest of the world. In political debates, he was invariably taking sides with the advocates of imperial policies (Austria and Prussia during the war over Schleswig-Holstein in 1865, and then against France in 1870. Or even Great Britain in South Africa, and finally in India as well[2]).

Strange as it may seem, Max Müller's political courage and the difficulties

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1. A detailed analysis of the common forms of colonial ideology can be found in *"White Mutiny". The Ilbert Crisis in India and Genesis of the Indian National Congress* (Hirschmann, 1980). This text was given as an oral presentation and represents the preliminary findings of a larger research on the role of public libraries in the diffusion of victorian orientalism.

2. See J.M. Voigt; the 'solution' that Max Müller would have desired was an imperial alliance between England, Germany and the United States.

that he was occasionally faced with, were never due to reservations that he might have expressed about imperialism. They were almost always linked, on the contrary, to the fact that he was in favour of imperial policies as well as a supporter of at least two (English and German) imperial powers and that he never really accepted to defend one rather than the other.

Max Müller's imperialism made him translate "God save the Queen" into Sanskrit. It did not however lead him to identify political imperialism and cultural imperialism. Of course we find in his works all the cultural stereotypes that orientalism has associated with India: a so-called "real India", that of Vedic antiquity and high Brahmanic culture to which he refers through his own experience as a Sanskritist; an India of the villages as well which he opposed, like many others, to the reality of large Indian cities. Nor did he fail to succumb to the common stereotypes about a contemplative and meditative India opposed to a more action-driven Western world.

Was this then despite his orientalism or more probably because of it? We could give a multitude of examples showing that Max Müller took a firm stand against the forms of cultural imperialism of his time. He was, for instance, no less severe than Ronald Inden when he denounced the ethnocentric and extremely contemptuous nature of Mill's history. Likewise, he never hesitated to denounce the racial and cultural stereotyping rampant amongst the British in India.

The same remark applies to his vast contribution to Indo-European studies. It would be equally difficult to accuse him of having used his erudition to try and widen the gap between the East and the West. The same thing could be said of the distinction between Semitic and Indo-European cultures: Max Müller always regretted, for example, that the Bible was not included in his collection of *Sacred Books of the East*[3].

We could add other examples: his defence of Tilak (as an orientalist, of course, and as an orientalist only) or his increasing skepticism towards racial theories. The same goes for his defence of Indian culture, which included respect of, and real concern for, the movements of religious reform that were then emerging. In all these cases, although Max Müller's orientalism voiced some cultural prejudices, it was nonetheless turned against the most blatant ones of his time.

Thus, the work of Max Müller, despite all the recognition that it may have enjoyed in his time, does not testify to the importance of orientalism in imperial ideology. Max Müller didn't oppose a hypothetical use of his science to imperial ends. On the contrary, he often regretted that it was so little used and that he wasn't

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3. There also, Max Müller could acknowledge the value of jewish culture without too much compassion for jewish people themselves: " *disgraceful as the antisemitic riots have been in Germany and in Russia, there can be no doubt that in this as in most cases, bothh sides were to blame and there is little prospect of peace being reestablished till many more heads have been broken* " (Muller, 1901, p.70)

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offered the opportunity, for instance, to train the elites of the Empire more decisively.

Max Müller was certainly proud to hear that when the Prince of Wales embarked on his voyage to India in 1875, his baggage contained several copies of Müller's critical edition of the Vedas which he was taking as gifts for the Hindu sovereigns that he was to meet (Cohn, 1987, 652). It is hardly likely though that the future King would have taken so gracious a part in the diffusion of the works of Annie Besant though her book certainly played, in India, a role as important as that of Max Müller's. Besides, at the time, Annie Besant, who had not yet joined the theosophists, was very busy collecting tens of thousands of signatures on a petition that she wished to present to Parliament. Its objective was to oppose the voyage of the Prince of Wales and to denounce British imperialism in India.

There is something singular about the life of Annie Besant. Before turning into a convinced theosophist, and then succeeding H.P. Blavatsky, the founder of the movement, as its leader, she had been the young wife of a pastor. She then changed for the first time. Having lost faith in Christianity, she became one of the most famous radical militants of her time in Great Britain. To this day, it is difficult to find a single "progressist" theme—from women suffrage, access to contraception to the defence of free love, from anti-racism and anti-imperialism, not forgetting atheism, to socialism and the union movement—whose cause was not thrust forward by Annie Besant, often in a decisive manner, at one period or the other of her life. And it would be difficult to find Annie Besant or most theosophists, making the slightest ideological concession to discriminations based on sex, race, religion or any imagined superiority of the West [4].

It would also seem that historians encountered particular difficulties in assessing the exact role played by theosophists in the Indian nationalist movement. A.O. Hume, for instance, was greatly influenced by this movement when he took part in the launching of the Congress Party; he was also considered by some to be an unofficial agent of the English, whose aim would have been to impede the nationalist movement rather than help its cause. Annie Besant too was never forgiven for having more or less condoned the Amritsar massacre; besides, this signalled the end of her political influence in India.

Nonetheless, it is a fact that before Gandhi assumed the leading role in the nationalist movement, Annie Besant and the theosophical movement played a very active catalyst role. Not only were a large number of those who were to become the leaders of the Congress influenced by theosophy and the theosophists, but on at least three occasions (creation of the Congress, formation of the Home Rule Leagues, establishment of the Hindu College), they played a central role in the establishment

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4. Absolute non-discrimination is, besides, the first of the three commandments of the theospohical faith.

of organisational and institutional structures that were going to be rapidly appropriated, consolidated and fully utilised by the nationalist movement.

There is, of course, another dimension to the theosophist movement which must be analysed. No one perhaps, contributed more than the theosophists—and Annie Besant, here too, played a decisive role—to the spreading, towards the end of the nineteenth century, of an extravagant imagery of the East and of India in particular. They thus reinforced, as perhaps never before, all the stereotypes available on oriental spirituality as opposed to the materialism of the West. What more can be asked to support such a point of view than the wild theories contained in H.P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, the beginnings of Krishnamurti—the new Messiah—if not the flourishing of imaginary Mahatmas and great masters of all sorts who started to blossom then, all over India and the world. Even the most serious Marxist historians, having read a little too much of Kipling in their youth, saw there, for more than a century, the irrefutable proof of the all-powerful imperial order (cf. Bipin Chandra, 1988). If we really need to identify what sort of orientalism it was that corresponded most effectively at the time to the type of discursive formation defined by Edward Said, there is little doubt that one of the most outstanding manifestations can be found with the theosophists.

Let us now take stock: Macaulay was certainly a partisan of cultural imperialism but was he really an orientalist? Max Müller and Annie Besant were, without doubt, orientalists, each in their own way, but were they also advocates of cultural imperialism? If Max Müller was definitely an ideologist of imperialism, in the political sense of the term, can one say as much in the case of Annie Besant?

All these questions certainly call for complex answers. From a methodological point of view, the real problem lies in establishing the importance of such complexities. If we take the notion of "hegemonic discourse" too seriously, it is clear that we will underestimate the nuances of the various types of discourse. We can see clearly that if we take all manifestations of orientalism to be simple variations of a single form of discourse, we run several risks: firstly, as Jayant Lele (1994) demonstrated, that of giving not only a monolithic but a deeply reduced vision of the subject.

Thus, when he excludes all references to the theosophist movement in his analysis, following a firmly established tradition, Ronald Inden not only clouds the understanding of an essential side of orientalism. He also does exactly what modern historians reproach colonial historiography with doing, i.e., only taking into account the elitist forms (academic or governmental) of a social and cultural phenomenon, without examining their links with manifestations of more marginal appearance but of no less real influence.

There is a further risk—if we do not take into account the ambivalence as well as the diversity of orientalist discourse, we will distort, almost as deeply as orientalism itself could, the historical reality to which this discourse belongs. Let us

consider for example this comment of Edward Said one of Macaulay's most often quoted pronouncements: "Macaulay's was an ethnocentric opinion with ascertainable results. He was speaking from a position of power where he could translate his opinions into the decision to make an entire subcontinent of natives submit to studying a language not their own. This is in fact what happened." (Said,1984, 13). As Bruno Latour remarked, even though he was thinking of the supremacy of scientific method: "To imperialism that is only too real, we do not need to grant total imperialism."

The risk does not lie solely in perpetuating the idea of a total malleability of colonised populations or even that of their complete absence from participation in the fashioning of the culture of an epoch. It lies perhaps more in giving forms of governmental rhetoric that were often extreme and provocative (even if we judge them by the criteria of the time) a sort of omnipotence that the authors themselves did not claim, and that these forms have never of course acquired to this day.

By endeavouring, on the contrary, to differentiate between the various forms assumed by orientalism during the Victorian age, we do not only uncover the very distinct modes of knowledge, positions of power and social or ideological commitments, all things that we could finally reduce to a "field" of common interest, in the sense that Bourdieu gives to this term. We are also forced to follow a network of extremely heterogeneous actors whose interactions make it necessary to shift the analysis continually along lines of research that are often unexpected.

2. MISSING LINKS

Max Müller's access to the Veda was through the copying and compilation of manuscripts that were available in libraries in Paris and London, or of texts that had been entrusted to him by contemporary Sanskritists (Burnouf and Wilson in particular). His critical edition of the Veda was accompanied by the commentary, written by Sayana, a fourteenth century author, who paraphrased it exhaustively with various annotations and analyses[5].

One of the main problems in Vedic studies is to decide what value should be ascribed to exegeses not only in the interpretation of the Vedic texts but, even more fundamentally, in the very definition of their most literal meaning. We need only read Louis Renou's work, devoted to the masters of Vedic philology, to understand the large variety of stands taken by different parties. On the whole, though, it would seem that most of the Sanskritists adopted the position advocated most systematically by Roth, another great Sanskritist and Max Müller's contemporary— disclaiming almost any importance whatsoever of the Hindu tradition, of Sayana's

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5. See Louis Renou's critical appreciation of Sayana's annotations (Renou, 1928, p. 8)

commentary in particular, for a literal interpretation of the Veda.

From this point of view, Max Müller's work is rather ambiguous. It would be difficult to reproach him with having completely ignored the importance of Hindu tradition in understanding the Veda. The very fact that he included a version as complete as possible of Sayana's commentary to his first critical edition of the Rigveda proves it. And yet, if Max Müller was considered to be one of the greatest scholars of his time by his contemporaries, it is not because he published the text of an Indian erudite of the fourteenth century but rather because he flattered himself that he had printed the "oldest book in the world" for the first time[6]. Going by Louis Renou, the same remark would be applicable to Wilson, who supervised Max Müller's work for a long time in the name of the East India Company: "But no matter what Wilson says in his preface, his work is less a translation of the Rgveda than a translation of Sayana"[7].

Several Sanskritists have a tendency to consider the deciphering of the Vedas as an Western speciality. They deny nearly all relevance of the Hindu tradition, only conceding that it was instrumental in the literal preservation of texts or in the most ancient exegetic traditions, but wrote off its recent or contemporary manifestations with a few brief lines. Even Max Müller, who was perhaps the Sanskritist most open to Indian religious reformers of his time, said about Dayanand Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, that "his ignorance of English deprived him of much that would have been helpful to him, and would have kept him from some of his wild ideas about the Vedas" (Müller, 1982, 96).

This is why there is a certain irony in drawing a parallel between the work of Sanskritists and that of theosophists of the Victorian age. H.P. Blavatsky, founder of the theosophist movement, was rightly reproached with having written her most famous books (*Isis unveiled* and *The secret doctrine*) as though she had had first hand knowledge of the material she treated. In a pamphlet fairly humourously entitled 'Isis very much unveiled', W.E. Coleman proved that in fact she had not looked at more than a hundred of the 1400 books cited in her first book's bibliography, and had drawn all her references from them (Farquhar, 1915, 224). Even more interestingly, he showed that most of the information contained in 'The

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6. We have Müller's own testimony about his career (Muller, 1901). There is also a vast correspondence which has been extensively consulted in the biography by Nirad Chaudhuri (1974) about whom it must n't be forgotten however, that he is himself first a polemist and a great writer

7. The passage deserves to be fully quoted : " But whatever Wilson might say in his preface, his work is less a translation of the Rigveda than a translation of Sayana. Convinced that Sayana was in a position to understand the Veda much better than an European interpreter (these are his own words), he followed the Hindu author even in his worst contradictions : going to the point of replacing the vivid or precise term in the text with the proper or generic equivalent provided by the commentary "(Renou, 1928, p. 5).

Secret Doctrine' in fact came from three books including Wilson's *Vishnu Purana* and Dowson's *Hindu Classical Dictionary*. Likewise, she used information contained in the *Asiatic Researches* (Campbell, 1980, 41) without giving references Besides, her book begins with a Vedic hymn whose translation was directly lifted from Max Müller.

It may accordingly be appropriate to say that the champions of scientific orientalism in Europe suffered the same fate at the hands of the theosophists that Brahmanic tradition did at the hands of the former. They did not hesitate to appropriate anything that could serve their purpose, especially the most ancient references. They did not hesitate either to belittle, marginalise and sometimes even remove explicit references to the intermediary process of transmission and exegesis of texts without which they would not have had access to them. For Max Müller as well as for the theosophists and most of the erudites of the time, it was the western libraries that provided privileged access to knowledge. Except that those who had adequate training worked in the manuscript room of course, while the others made do with the public reading room.

Even if we confine our study to sanskritists and theosophists (not taking into account, for example, administrators, missionaries and so many others), we can see now that there are at least two missing links for the understanding of the scope of orientalism during the Victorian age. The first is the better known and is also the subject of current enquiry and criticism—the process of disjunction between western knowledge of the Veda and Hindu exegetic tradition.

The second missing link is the one corroborated by the seeming conjunction between movements of western inspiration (like the theosophist movement) and the Hindu tradition with which they identified.

Yet another hiatus exists, as significant as the two preceding ones, but which seems to have never really been analysed. It is created by the efforts of learned orientalists, theosophists and spiritual movements to be differentiated from each other.

Scientific orientalists had only disdain or scorn for the work of theosophists. This is understandable insofar as the books of the theosophists (like their modern equivalents) had at least as much influence and success as those of the scholars, while representing the most total negation of their work that could be imagined. The orientalists devoted years if not decades to publishing manuscripts to try and clarify their meaning or their history. On the other hand, the theosophists, when they were not simply fabricating these texts, seemed to take delight in making matters more obscure, claiming a perfect knowledge of their ultimate meaning when they didn't even have first hand knowledge of them.

There was also another characteristic of the theosophists that vastly displeased most erudites. Max Müller, for example, may well have been a German by origin, was perhaps not always regarded as sufficiently orthodox in matters of

religion or politics, had also perhaps an excessive penchant for Indian or oriental cultures. He was nonetheless an extremely respectable personality, holding a chair at Oxford and being a private counselor to Queen Victoria.

The least that can be said is that the main leaders of the theosophist movement were rather different. It would certainly be difficult to find personalities as little respectable and as 'shocking' as Colonel Olcott and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the co-founders of the theosophist movement. Though the former may have claimed that he was a hero of the American civil war and the latter that she was a Russian aristocrat, other rumours also abounded about them. They were suspected of having abandoned husbands, wives or children and of having led the dissolute lives of adventurers and charlatans in different parts of the world. They were not only accused of it, it was proved that they had exploited the naiveté of their audiences during the spiritual seances which then enjoyed a large wave of popularity in all classes of society in the West. Finally questions arose about the real finalities of the theosophist movement in India and H.P. Blavatsky was suspected of being a spy in the service of the Czar.

The couple who more or less took over their role at the head of the theosophist movement, i.e. Leadbater and Annie Besant, weren't any more reassuring by the standards of the time. Leadbater was publicly implicated in a homosexual scandal with a teenager, Krishnamurti, destined, according to the theosophists, to become the new Messiah of his time. As for Annie Besant, she had actively supported, as mentioned earlier, most 'subversive' causes of the period.

But, if Max Müller wished to place as much distance as he could between his work and that of the theosophists, the feeling was mutual. H.P. Blavatsky did not acknowledge any debt towards Wilson and other Sanskritists any more than Wilson did towards Sayana. Instead of appealing to science to ascertain the singularity of her work, she referred to the supernatural nature of the inspiration that served as her guide. And just as Hindu tradition could serve upon occasion as a foil for the Sanskritists, the Sanskritists served as foil for the theosophists. It was even, according to H.P. Blavatsky, the blatant falseness of Max Müller's and other contemporary scholars' interpretation of the oriental doctrines that had incited her to reveal publicly, quite simply, "the outline of a few fundamental truths from the Secret Doctrine of the Archaic Age".

3. CONCLUSION

In order to understand what forms orientalism assumed in the second half of the nineteenth century, it seems to me that one must take into account not one but at least three or more processes of reading:

    – the first one is well known; it is exemplified by scholars who worked on

texts they progressively assembled from manuscripts and copies of manuscripts, and who published critical editions, translations with commentaries and learned exegeses.

– the second process is equally important. It is carried out by readers who were extremely different, both socially and culturally, from the scholars, and who tended to make theirs the works of the latter. In doing so, they altered both meaning and purpose of the works, because they reintroduced a sacred dimension into texts which the sanskritists had tried to eradicate, or else because they introduced a fair amount of confusion and obscurity in texts which the scholars tried to read with as much precision and clarity as possible.

– The third process, no doubt, the more influential one but which is beyond the scope of this paper, would be then to compare and to analyse the reception of these different brands of orientalism in India itself.

Such processes of recycling of learned works are rarely analysed as such, because they are both concealed by the authors and despised by learned scholars. But if we concentrate on the processes of transmission and distortion of knowledge, Victorian orientalism appears as the hybrid result of multiple readings and misreadings, revelations and concealments, rigorous scholarship and sweeping generalisations. In order to analyse it one must not be overly impressed by the "ivory tower" of the scholar and the rather fanciful spirituality of the theosophists.

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GENESIS OF LOUIS DUMONT'S ANTHROPOLOGY
The 1930s in France Revisited*

ROLAND LARDINOIS

> " *There are those among us who have followed in their [the Hindus] erring footsteps with regrettable docility. I refer especially to indianists Representative of the philological school, they obey an almost irresistible preference to regard the problem from this traditional aspect (.). The brahmanic theory is, as it were, their native atmosphere (...)* "
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> Emile Senart, *Les castes dans l'Inde* (1894)

Since the 1950s the research conducted by Louis Dumont on the social organization of castes, on the Hindu pantheon and on ancient India, has profoundly renewed the domain of Indian studies. This research reveals, indeed, an innovative application of anthropology, concerned with illuminating the facts observed in the field studies through familiarity with the Sanskrit literature studied by Indologists. Published at the end of the 1960s, *Homo Hierarchicus*[1], in which Dumont systematically sets forth his model for understanding the Hindu culture, testifies to this renewal. However, one cannot truly understand Dumont's anthropology without also considering his subsequent *Essais sur l'individualisme (Essays on*

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1. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus. The Caste System and Its Implications* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1988 [First Complete Revised English Edition, The University of Chicago, 1980, trad. from L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus. Essai sur le système des castes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, reprinted, Gallimard, coll. "Tel", 1970]). This revised edition includes a preface in which Louis Dumont adresses the debates raised by the book, and a postcript in which he sets forth his theory of hierarchy ; all references are to this edition (the Sanskrit words have been transliterated without diacritical marks).

Individualism)[2]. In these studies, Dumont describes the Western world as one centred around egalitarian values, which he contrasts with the hierarchical values prevalent in the Indian culture and, more generally, in the universes we call traditional or premodern.

Dumont's work was widely discussed and gave rise to much controversy. On one hand, a number of anthropologists basing themselves on an internal analysis of Dumont's work, have long expressed their disagreement with a viewpoint on Indian culture that one could qualify, with Richard Burghart, as being that of the Brahmans (that is a "Brahman-centric" point of view)[3]. On the other hand, historians have developed, more recently, an external critique of Dumont's anthropology in which they question it as being "one of the clearest heirs of the orientalist legacy"[4]. But all these criticisms, at the very least, underline a paradox of which they seem completely unaware: how can the Brahmanic viewpoint replace that of the scholar in Dumont's understanding of the caste system, when such an understanding appeals to Durkheim's sociology and its precise distinction between an indigenous viewpoint and a sociological knowledge of the former?

To give a proper answer to this question, one must seriously consider Louis Dumont's assertion that he owes his interest in India not only to the teachings of Marcel Mauss, but also to the reading that he did "very early", at the beginning of the 1930s, of the esoteric essayist René Guénon. A comparative reading of these two authors suggests, indeed, that Guénon exercises more than a simple "influence" on Dumont's work[5]. Therefore in this article, firstly, we will try to uncover the unity of principles which underlie Dumont's anthropology; secondly, we will try to find out what these principles owe to the social universe which produced them: that is, the field of Indian studies in France, a field understood as an objective space of mediation of external social forces restated, in Dumont's work, in terms of problematic and methods, of theories and concepts—in brief, in terms of epistemological or scientific choices.

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2 L. Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne* (Paris : Ed. du Seuil, 1983).

3 Cf. Richard Burghart, "Ethnographers and their Local Counterparts in India", in R. Fardon (ed.), *Localizing strategies : Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing* (Edinburg : Scottish Academic Press ; Washington : Smithsonian Institution, 1990), pp. 260-279.

4. C. A. Breckenridge and P. van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.13.

5. With regard to Guénon, "let us not overstate his influence", Louis Dumont warns while spontaneously recognizing it (personal interview with Louis Dumont, March 25, 1993). Some years earlier, Louis Dumont already said about his personal involvment in the study of Hindu culture : "Why have I chosen India ? I read René Guénon very early", in "Entretien avec Louis Dumont", *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, tome XXII, 1984, n°68, p 157.

1. "EAST AND WEST": A THOUGHT OF ORDER AND HIERARCHY

In 1921, René Guénon published his first book on Hinduism, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines)*[6], which marked the beginning of his career as an essayist. His work can be defined by two major orientations: on the one hand, an apology for tradition and its main esoteric schools of thought: and, on the other hand, a criticism of the modern world and the development of Western individualism. But Guénon's originality derives, in part, from his advocacy of a comparative viewpoint, which consists of explaining the modern world from the knowledge we can obtain from the major Eastern civilizations.

René Guénon could be defined as a philosopher concerned with doctrinal esotericism[7]. He sets forth a concept of tradition, i.e., the unchanging and eternal metaphysical principles which form the relationship of men to each other, and link them with the socio-cosmic universe. Guénon perceives this world as a meaningful whole , as a "Universal Totality", which expresses the principles of a supra-individual and supra-rational transcendent order. According to him, these principles constitute the "primordial tradition", the common origins of humanity, its "normal" state. But this "primordial tradition" expresses itself only in particular cases, which are so many "contingent examples" of the tradition of which India represents a stereotypical case. From this viewpoint, Western civilization for Guénon arose from a particular and unique rupture in which the "modern mind" grew out of an opposition to the "traditional mind", under the ascendancy of the critical operation of (Western) reason. The archetypal contrast between "tradition" and "modernity" merges here with the contrast between "East" and "West".

According to Guénon, an understanding of Hinduism implies at least two explicit postulates. First, Guénon formally condemns all historic definitions of Hinduism because he considers that the "principles" that frame the tradition are of an unchanging, eternal character[8]: these principles are of a metaphysical nature and they can be studied only by metaphysical means. Second, he asserts the absolute superiority of the indigenous perspective over the "Western viewpoint" in all attempts to understand tradition. For him, the Brahmans stand as the "authorized interpreters"[9] of Hindu culture. Therefore, he wishes only to serve as their

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6 René Guénon, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (Paris , Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1921). In addition to this work, one could cite *Orient et Occident* (Paris, Guy Tredaniel, 1987 [First edition 1924]) ; *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vedanta* (Paris : Editions Traditionnelles, 1982 [First edition 1925]) ; *La Crise du monde moderne* (Paris : Gallimard, 1946 [First edition 1927]). Unless otherwise specified, the quotes refer to these works.

7. On esotericism in general, and René Guénon's place within it, cf. A. Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme Occidental* (Paris : Gallimard, 1986).

8. R. Guénon, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues, op. cit.,* p.100.

9. *Ibid.* p. 52.

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mouthpiece for expressing the truth of their tradition.

In order to understand the consequences of Guénon's theses for academic approaches to Hinduism, one must refer to a short treatise published at the end of the 1920s: Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel (Spiritual authority and Temporal Power)[10]. In this pamphlet, Guénon clearly expresses his concept of a universal model of hierarchical relationships, according to which the temporal power of the king is embedded in the spiritual authority of the priest. In the Hindu universe, "the authority of the Brahmans" manifests itself as a "principle of superior unity" which gives legitimacy to the social order, so that under normal circumstances, the temporal power of the ksatriya (the warriors) had necessarily to be subordinated to it. In this civilization, "where religion penetrates all of human existence", political power and "all that makes up (...) the social life is found to be embedded in it"[11]. Starting from this Brahmanic theory of power, he evolves an organicist viewpoint, according to which there is a perfect and harmonious correspondence between spiritual principles and the social hierarchy of castes. These latter are arranged according to their traditional "nature" and "function" in the world order expressed by the notion of dharma[12].

The second theme that permeates the work of Guénon is his criticism of all forms of Western modernity that question the very foundation of the traditional social universes. In La Crise du monde moderne (The Crisis of the Modern World), Guénon deals with individualism and develops a critique of the uses of science and reason. This part of Guénon's work is an attempt to sketch the origins of modernity and the genesis of Western individualism. "Modernity" appears to Guénon as a "deviation and an anomaly" with respect to the "primordial tradition". Thus the French Revolution marks the end of a long process, the point of sharp rupture with the normative traditional order. "Modern science", according to Guénon, is the beneficiary of this process of rupture and of desecration of the enchanted world of the past. Because it is of a "completely empirical character"[13], this "secular science" represents an impoverished version of the traditional "sacred science", of which it remains only "residues"[14]. Guénon then offers an additional inverted perspective: it is by embracing the principles of tradition that one can "grasp the true meaning of the modern world" because, in order to understand the latter, it is

10. R. Guénon, Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel (Paris : Guy Trédaniel, 1984 [First edition 1929]).

11. R. Guénon, Mélanges (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), p.72 (emphasis added).

12. The idea of dharma refers both to the socio-economic order as a transcendent principle, and to the duties that each Hindu, according to the group to which he belongs, is socially obliged to observe to maintain this order.

13. R. Guénon, Le Règne de la quantité et le signe des temps (Paris : Gallimard, 1972 [First edition 1945]), p.74 (emphasis added).

14. Ibid., especially pp.180-86 (emphasis added) ; on the critique of science, cf. R. Guénon, Orient et occident, op. cit., especially, pp. 41-73.

necessary not to be affected by it to any degree[15]. Guénon thus attempts to work a "restoration" of tradition and of "sacred science" in an essentially polemic work, whose character is at the same time inspired and prophetic, and which contrasts with all historical and sociological research of an academic type.

2. RENÉ GUÉNON: THE LIFE-HISTORY OF AN OUTCAST

The main characteristic that defines Guénon's intellectual career during the interwar period, is a process of double rejection. In effect, he was cast out both by the Indologists from the Sorbonne and the intellectual circles of the Catholic Institute of Paris. This double rejection accounts for the marginal position that Guénon occupied in the field of Indian studies and, more generally, in the intellectual field during the 1930s.

René Guénon was born in Blois in the Loire valley in 1886 in a practising Catholic family from the provincial middle class. His father was an expert architect in an insurance Company. After secondary school in a religious institution in Blois, René Guénon began to prepare for the entrance examination to the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, but he abandoned the course at mid-year and enrolled in the Faculté des lettres at the Sorbonne where he obtained a diploma of higher advanced studies in philosophy in 1916. Three years later, he failed the agrégation exam in philosophy. Agrégation was at that time the highest diploma for teaching in the lycées, the top-ranking secondary schools: it was also a prerequisite for any position in the academic system. He taught philosophy in various public and private institutions before leaving France permanently in 1930 for Cairo, where he died in 1951, having converted to Islam[16].

In the early 1920s, Guénon wrote a thesis on Hindu philosophy under the guidance of Sylvain Lévi, the French Sanskritist whose erudition and whose academic position at the prestigious Collège de France made him the dominant figure in Indian studies[17]. Sylvain Lévi, who had at first accepted Guénon's project, refused the thesis which Guénon presented, judging the work unacceptable from an academic perspective. "He intends to exclude all elements which do not correspond to his ideas" wrote Sylvain Lévi in his report to the Dean of the Sorbonne. "All is in the Vedanta (...). He takes history and historical criticism much too lightly[18]".

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15. R. Guénon, *Le Règne de la quantité et le signe des temps, op. cit.,* p.8.

16. Cf. P.M. Sigaud (ed.), *René Guénon* (Paris : L'Age d'Homme, coll. "Les Dossiers H", 1984), pp. 299-301.

17. Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935) passed his *agrégation* exam in literature in 1883. He served as Director of Studies at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (Vth Section, Science of Religions) and held the Chair of Sanskrit language and literature at the *Collège de France* from 1894.

18. Excerpt from Sylvain Lévi's report to Dean Jean Brunot, cited by J.P. Laurent, *Le sens caché dans l'oeuvre de René Guénon* (Paris : L'Age d'Homme, 1975), p. 67.

Outcast by Lévi and his colleagues, Guénon was introduced by the philosopher Jacques Maritain to the Catholic Institute of Paris, where the atmosphere completely opposed, socially and intellectually, the "spirit of the new Sorbonne"[19]. The neo-Thomist philosophers including Father Peillaube, founder and director of the Revue de Philosophie (Review of Philosophy), and Father Sertillange, editor of the Revue Thomiste (Thomist Review) were sympathetic to the critique of Theosophy that Guénon had published in 1921. Guénon's article which appeared subsequently in several theologico-philosophical reviews influential among Catholic circles, developed a syncretic viewpoint inspired by a vedanto-occultist traditionalism as well as primitive forms of Christianity. But this attempt again failed and in 1927, Guénon was effectively excluded by this Catholic milieu[20].

In order to understand this process of double rejection, it is necessary to return to the first stages of Guénon's intellectual career. From 1905 to 1910, Guénon by virtue of his various affiliations, was an active participant of several esoteric brotherhoods (Gnostics, Kabalists, Rosicrucians, Freemasons, and others). If these groups may strike us as contradictory in their internal and external doctrinal approaches, they nevertheless shared a common quest for a mystic order, a common search for the "primordial tradition" that the "West" supposedly had lost whereas it had been preserved in the "East". In fact, the syncretic doctrines of these groups integrated several elements indifferently attributed, among others, to the major religions of Asia and Middle East, be it the Brahmanism derived from neo-Vedanta, Taoism or Islam. In this heterogeneous milieu, Guénon's uniqueness resulted from the ambivalence of his position, and from the syncretic nature of the unification his intellectual system sought to develop. He criticized Theosophy as well as spiritualism, which he denounced on the ground that they were erroneous, and he defended the universality of a metaphysical idea which integrated the heterogeneous elements of the varied Eastern civilizations. Moreover, these different traditions did not appear to him to be contradictory to those of primitive Christianity.

Nevertheless, one cannot fully appreciate the effects that these esoteric-cum-occultist brotherhoods produced in the intellectual field, without questioning the relationships that link these groups with the political field in the early decades of the 20th century. The advocates of tradition shared strong anti modern sentiments with many neo-Thomist philosophers, and that should be understood in a double way. First, there was an intellectual and moral reaction to the new religious sciences that developed among University scholars by the end of the 19th century, particularly within the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, whose positivist methods used for studying religions questioned the very foundation of the "sacred sciences" that were still the monopoly of the Church. I allude here to the well known debate about

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19. With regard to this contrast, see the charges which Maritain brought against the Sorbonne at the beginning of the century, in R. Maritain, *Mes grandes amitiés* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1992 [First edition 1949]), especially pp. 49-89.

20. Cf. M.-F. James, *Esotérisme et Christianisme autour de René Guénon* (Paris . Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1981).

Catholic modernism. But this Catholic anti modernism was at the same time a political anti modernism, i.e. a criticism of "democracy" and of equality as a system of values inherited from the Enlightenment. Around World War I, these two constituents of anti modernism crystallized in Charles Maurras's movement, the Action Française[21]. For the supporters of these movements, the nationalist right manifested in the temporal order the same social, political and ethical values that the Church, for its part, defended in the spiritual domain. Although Guénon never personally engaged in this movement, the intellectual theses which he defended, his political opinions, as well as his networks of friends made him a full member of this ideological family.

In 1926, however, condemnation by the Vatican of the Action Française sparked a profound crisis between the Catholic intellectuals and the party of Maurras. Guénon's exclusion from the neo-Thomist circles was one consequence of this crisis. This provided the polemic context in which Guénon wrote his 1929 pamphlet: Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel (Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power), in order to enlighten his friends who refused the authority of Pius XI. This booklet was intended by Guénon as a militant act, that is, an intervention "from the purely doctrinal viewpoint, from which all else derives[22]", and not from a position of contingent political action. The pamphlet takes the form of an explicit defence of the Church's position in the name of the universality of doctrine and its encompassing character. In this pages, Guénon compares India with the medieval Western society in order to illustrate the universal supremacy "of the spiritual over the temporal."

3. DURKHEIM'S SOCIOLOGY AT STAKE

It is further necessary to understand how these social and political struggles were reinterpreted within the specialized field of Indian studies. At the turn of the century, the development of Durkheimian sociology within academia upset the hierarchy between disciplines and introduced new subjects for research[23]. In the field of Indian studies, this transformation entailed a significant turning point. Some anthropologists began to study Sanskrit literature. in order to better comprehend the

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21. With regard to this encounter, see V. Nguyen "Maître, Maurras, Guénon : contre-révolution et contre-culture", in P.M. Sigaud (ed.), René Guénon, op. cit., pp. 175-191.

22. R. Guénon, Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel, op. cit., pp.10 and 13.

23 Cf. among others, C. Charle, "Le champ universitaire parisien à la fin du 19e siècle", in Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, n°47-48, June 1983, pp. 77-89 ; C. Charle, La France des universitaires (1870-1940), (Paris : Ed. du Seuil, 1994) ; V. Karady, "Les professeurs de la République. Le marché scolaire, les réformes universitaires et les transformations de la fonction professorale à la fin du 19e siècle", in Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, n°47-48, June 1983, pp. 90-112 ; and V. Karady, "Durkheim, Les sciences sociales et l'université : bilan d'un semi-échec", Revue française de sociologie, vol. XVII, n°2, April-June 1976, pp. 267-311.

social and cognitive structures of Hindu culture. At the same time, the classical indological disciplines were enriched by studies undertaken by the French school of sociology, itself inspired, in part, by British empirical works. In demonstrating, notably, that the concept of classification and, more generally, symbolic systems, resulted from historical and social determinations that varied according to culture, Durkheimian sociology allowed classical Indology to set about denaturalizing the collective categories of Brahmanic theory and wresting them from the essentialist vision of the social world in which they were rooted.

When Hubert and Mauss published, in 1899, L'Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice (Essay on the Nature and Fonction of Sacrifice), they based their work on the research that Sylvain Lévi had conducted and published in 1898 as La Doctrine du sacrifice dans les BraSAgehmanas (The Doctrine of Sacrifice in the Brahmanas)[24]. In the same period, the anthropological studies undertaken as part of the decennial censuses gave rise to two important French works on the caste system by the Sanskritist Emile Senart[25] and, several years later, by the sociologist closest to Durkheim, Célestin Bouglé[26].

At the opposite pole of the field of Indian studies, intellectual principles of a different nature had taken form. Not having been able to force his ideas, either on Indologists or on the Catholic circles to which he was closed by his ethics and politics, Guénon emerges as the leader of the esoteric movement that he had never really left. In the early 1930s, Guénon became the editor of a journal first called Voile d'Isis (Isis's Veil) and then Etudes traditionnelles (Traditional Studies). This publication disseminated his ideological message and founded a new school of thought. What Guénon had in mind when he tried to introduce the methods of scholarly research and the problematic borrowed from a classical academic and Catholic exegesis into the universe of esotericism, was to promote his review as a major French publication on tradition-centred orientalism[27]. As against the scholarly orientation of the Journal Asiatique, the non-academic (and even anti-academic) trend in Indian studies crystallized for a while around Guénon[28]. The epistemology

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24. Regarding the relationship between Sylvain Lévi and Marcel Mauss, cf. M. Fournier, *Marcel Mauss*, (Paris : Fayard, 1994), especially pp. 93-104 and pp. 150-155.

25. Emile Senart, *Les Castes dans l'Inde. Les faits et le système* (Paris : Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927) ; it was first published as a collection of articles in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* in 1894 (trad. to english, London, Methuen and Co, 1930).

26. Célestin Bouglé, *Essai sur le régime des castes* (3rd edition) (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France [P.U.F.] 1935).

27. Cf. "Une entreprise guénonienne : 'Les Etudes traditionnelles'", in *Planète Plus*, April 1970, p. 141.

28. René Guénon was not alone in taking this stance. One should take into account Romain Rolland's position and his efforts to spread Gandhism and neo-Hindu reform movements in France between the two World Wars. But Romain Rolland's political involvment with the leftist parties placed himself in opposition to René Guénon who perceived him, anyway, as one of his rivals (I thank Charles Malamoud for having brought to my attention the singular vision of India developped by Romain Rolland).

which René Guénon applied to the great Eastern cultures contrasted sharply with the sociology of Emile Durkheim. In fact, Guénon continually denounced what he scornfully called "the (French) sociological school"[29], represented by the new Sorbonne. Two diametrically opposed positions emerged. On the one hand, stood the tenets of the Republican and rationalist university, defending a kind of positivist scholarship and a morality freed from religion, as in the works of Marcel Mauss and Sylvain Lévi, to cite only two names. On the other, stood the advocates of a conservative Catholic and nationalist culture, among whom we find Charles Maurras and René Guénon, who denigrated reason while strongly supporting the concepts of social order and hierarchy.

4. FROM "THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN WORLD" TO THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MODERNITY

To account for the internal contradictions one encounters in the study of Louis Dumont's anthropology, one must compare the latter works with those of René Guénon. While acknowledging his debt to Guénon, Dumont distinguishes himself from Guénon stating that he has arrived at "almost exactly the counterpoint of Guénon's theses"[30]. However, a careful analysis of Dumont's phraseology and his method of argument brings out a web of presumption not dissimilar from those of Guénon. This contradiction puts Dumont's reader in an untenable position. In fact, the parallelism has not been evident largely because of the suppression in the Indological discourse of all mention of Guénon.

Thus, the comparative sociological scheme which Dumont attempted to build can be understood as a retranslation into the post World War II universe of social anthropology, of philosophical and sociological questionings previously expressed albeit in other forms, particularly in the non-academic dominated spaces of the field of Indian studies. It appears, indeed, as if Dumont's work results from the encounter of two epistemically contradictory intellectual and social spaces which structured the field of Indian studies in France in the 1930s. The universe of esoteric thought assembled around René Guénon based on a neo-Aristotelian philosophy (or neo-Thomist, in the version developed by Catholic intellectuals), produced an essentialist and organist vision of the social world, and particularly that of India. To the contrary, Durkheimian sociology and classical indology developed a positivist and rationalist type of scholarship which contributed to bring to light the historic and

29 Cf. for exemple R. Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, op. cit., p.30 ; on the fight led by the nationalist right against Durkheim and his sociology, cf. W. Lepenies, *Les Trois Cultures. Entre science et littérature, l'avènement de la sociologie* (Paris : Edition of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1990) especially pp. 45-86.

30. "Dumont l'Intouchable" (Entretien avec Jean-Paul Enthoven), *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 6, 1984, reprinted in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, vol. XXII, 1984, p. 31.

social determinations inherent in the different concepts and notions which constitutes Hinduism.

This encounters gave rise to a double misunderstanding concerning as much its production as its reception. The resulting amalgamation implies, among other things, a process of cognitive transformation, not necessarily a conscious project, in which Dumont shifts and reshapes concepts from these two intellectual universes. It appears, indeed, as if in Homo Hierarchicus Dumont uses Max Weber as an academic garantee rather than as a theoretical reference. As he later concedes: his "research is voluntarily located outside of the weberian paradigm"[31]. Dumont operates by referring to ideas and values rather than transcendent principles: by sliding from the Durkheimian notion of social totality towards "Universal totality" which is indeed more a metaphysical than a sociological notion: by quoting Alexandre Koyré or Thomas Kuhn rather than Guénon with regard to the "crisis of the modern ideological paradigm"[32]. In short, Dumont replaces typical themes of the 1930s, "Tradition" and "The crisis of the modern world", in Guénon's formulation, with a quite different system of explicit theoretical references. For himself and for his reader, Louis Dumont proposes by this way a change of mental paradigm, implying that one should accept his sociological model as a neutral academic product, instead of one side of an ideological debate. By refusing to acknowledge a relationship of his ideas to the intellectual and social universe from which they sprang, Louis Dumont create a structure of compromise, in the analytical sense of the term. That is, Dumont's text is always susceptible to a double reading according to the nature of the universe to which it relates. One can neither reduce his text to one or other of the intellectual epistemically contradictory spaces from which it sprang[33].

5. INDIGENOUS THEORY AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL MODEL

The principal epistemological obstacles to a sociological understanding of Hinduism is what the anthropologist T. N. Madan nicely calls the "*home-made model*". Generally speaking, the sociologist must always take into account two kinds of knowledge of the social world he studies: on the one hand, indigenous knowledge and, on the other hand, scholarly knowledge which is essential to understand the indigenous viewpoint. The sociologist task becomes even more difficult when he is confronted with an indigenous understanding of a learned nature, as in the case of Hindu culture, which furnishes an exemplary model if not unique[34]. Classical

31. L. Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme*, *op.cit.*, p.23 (emphasis added).

32. L. Dumont, *Homo Æqualis. Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie contemporaine* (Paris : Gallimard, 1977), p. 18.

33. Cf. P. Bourdieu, *L'Ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris : Ed. de Minuit, 1988), from which I borrow this model of intelligibility.

34. The comparison arises, indeed, with the medieval theory of the "Three Orders", based precisely on the Indo-European tripartition of functions between priests, soldiers and

Hinduism, the product of an indigenous literate tradition, has evolved the Brahmanic system[35]. In fact, Dumont's analysis proceeds as though he did not distinguish between these two levels of knowledge or, more precisely, as if the distinction which he brought about remained rooted in the indigenous understanding of Hindu culture. There are, writes Dumont: "two indigenous models, one of which is very old [the model of the varna] but is still present in the culture quite apart from my interpretation. (...) I proposed to recognize it as underlying or completing the jati ideology"[36]. But in assigning himself the task of "systematizing the indigenous (...) theory of caste"[37], Dumont reintroduces the Brahmanic point of view which he had dismissed at the beginning of his project and he presents it as the scholarly, sociological model of the jëti system. Accordingly, the interpretations in Homo Hierarchicus can be seen as a thorough epistemological process of transubstantiation, in the course of which Dumont assumes that for understanding Hindu social world the values of Brahmanism must be taken as the principles of scientific truth rather than taking these values as an object of scientific analysis. This assumption leads Dumont to transform—in spite of himself—the literate indigenous theory of the caste system into a scholarly theory after having recast it in Durkheimian sociological language[38].

6. "HOMO HIERARCHICUS": A "DHARMIC" READING OF HINDUISM

The process of cognitive alchemy to which Dumont subjected the Brahmanic theory of the caste system crystallized in the concepts of hierarchy and power. One can distinguishes three clearly overlapping aspects. First, Dumont gives to the notion of hierarchy a "purely religious" sense, calling it the "true hierarchy" or further an

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peasants ; cf. G. Duby, *Les Trois Ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris : Gallimard, 1978) But the specificity of Hindu culture resides in the Brahmans' monopoly of learning, the consequences of which are built into the indigenous theory of the caste system.

35. This is why it seems to me that the current distinction which Anglo-saxon anthropology makes between local systems of meanings (of the "emic" type) and external interpretations (of the "etic" type) are not sufficient to understand the kind of epistemological problems raised in this article.

36. L. Dumont, "On Putative Hierarchy and Some Allergies to It", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (Special issue), vol. 5, december 1971, p. 73. Brahmanic society is divided into four hierarchically ordered var8a (or Orders) : Brahmans (priests), kÒatriya (soldiers), and vai‡ya (farmers and merchants) have access to the Vedic sacrifice, while ?udra (servants to the three other classes) are excluded from sacrifice. The word *jëti* (literally, birth) refers to the castes that are encountered in the field in India today.

37 L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.*, p. 37 (emphasis added).

38. Dumont here slides from the *logical sense* of Hinduism, as a system of values, to its *evaluative interpretation*, to use Weber's words Moreover, one finds again the kind of polemic that brought Durkheim up against the Orientalist scholar James Darmesteter who sought to make religious sentiment "the criterion of scientific truth", cf. E. Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris : Flammarion, 1988), pp. 126-127.

"ideal type of hierarchy [hiérarchie pure]"[39]: second, Dumont restricts the notion of power to "exclusively political power"[40]: and third, he presents a formalist, logical theorization from which he detaches as an invariant, the all-encompassing hierarchical relationship.

The radical distinction that Dumont makes between hierarchy and power is intended to take into account a central fact of Hinduism: in this universe structured by the opposition of the pure and the impure, the priest, in ritual terms, is superior to the king: that is the religious, ritualistic values "encompass" political values, such as power, which are relatively autonomous. This superiority can be observed in the social world: the dominant castes which possess the land and perpetuate at the local scale the royal function, have a ritual status inferior to that of the Brahmans. Furthermore, adds Dumont, "superiority and superior purity are identical: it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status"[41]. In other words, neither power nor wealth can establish proper status in the Hindu world. Taking up again the distinction outlined by Max Weber between status group and economic classes, one could interpret this opposition in terms of relative independence of competitive but complementary principles of classifying social groups in classical India[42]. But this interpretation contradicts Dumont's proposed reading of the literate indigenous theory of the var8a, according to which these two principles of classification, the ritual and the social one, would be absolutely distinct and ordered hierarchically. Thus, according to Dumont, Hinduism brings about a radical disjunction between the var8a of the Brahmans and that of the kÒatriya and, in the same way, between the cardinal values associated which each of these classes: on the one hand, that of status, expressed by the concept of dharma and, on the other, that of economic and political power, expressed in the notion of artha (economics) which would be subordinated to dharma from a point of view grounded on the religious values of Hinduism[43].

Erudite criticisms have addressed these analyses, but they leave unanswered questions on the implicit theory of knowledge underlying Dumont's model. If

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39. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op.cit.*, pp. 66 and 74.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 153 (emphasis added).

41. *Ibid.*, p. 56. For a synthetic viewpoint on the caste system, cf. R. Deliège, *Le système des castes* (Paris . P.U.F., 1993).

42. Dumont occasionally follows this interpretation by showing that the gift to the Brahmans "can be regarded as a means of transformation of material goods into values", cf. L. Dumont, "Caste, Racism and 'Stratification'. Reflections of a Social Anthropologist", in *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

43. For a detailed analysis, cf. L. Dumont, "The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India", in *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op.cit.*, pp. 287-313. *Dharma*, the socio-cosmic Order, *artha* (economic and politics) and *kama* (desire of pleasure), constitute the three goals of man (*purusartha*) in classical Hinduism : cf. M. Biardeau, *L'hindouisme. Anthropologie d'une civilization* (Paris . Flammarion, 1981 [trad. into english, Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1989)], especially pp. 49-76.

ideology, understood as a system of values (i.e. Hinduism), is the objective principle which forms, according to Dumont, the basis of the caste system, it is because: "the empirical approach is a misconstruction of Indian civilization: it amounts to assimilating dharma to artha"[44], that is, to inverting the Hindu hierarchical relationships between what is "encompassing" and what is "encompassed". But in this case, the misinterpretation lies in the fact that there is a confusion, from a logical viewpoint, between two distinct kinds of realities. The literate depiction of the Hindu social world given by the Brahmans in their purely scholarly tradition and the empirical reality of this description. Furthermore, from a cognitive viewpoint, the misinterpretation consists in grounding a sociological under-standing of Hinduism on the epistemological principles of the "indigenous science", that is on the Brahmanic theory of knowledge which Dumont implicitly appropriates to build his academic paradigm of the caste system.

If in Hinduism, the universe of artha is relatively dependent on the finalities of dharma, according to the indigenous literate depiction, that does not instruct us, a priori, about the sense of the relationship between empirical facts observed in the social world and what pertains to one or the other domain. The task of the sociologist is to make sense of the agreement or disagreement that he observes, firstly, between the distributions of different kinds of material and symbolic resources among the various jëti which he records in the reality of the empirical world and, secondly, the degree to which the cognitive structures of individuals or groups are accorded with the objective distributions of resources. Although the Brahmanic system imposes its clear principles of classification on the entirety of groups constituting the social world of caste, the conceptual or mental structures and values system which the sociologist encounters in the field are often express in indigenous discourses which do not necessarily fit with the indigenous scholarly universe.

The sociologist must also further question the cognitive principles behind an indigenous depiction of the social world, at the risk of imposing a particular viewpoint on it. In adopting the prescriptive model of the juridico-religious treatises which constitutes as universal the principles of dharma to which all other goals of man are subordinated, Dumont imposes on Hinduism the scholarly viewpoint of the priest that one could qualify not only as Brahmanic, but more exactly still as "dharmic". This intellectual perspective leads him to deny the reality of Hinduism's relationships of domination, affirming that the problem "exists only in the mind of the analyst"[45]. Indeed, from a Brahmanic viewpoint, the relationships dividing and opposing castes are not meaningful in terms of domination—although they are also

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44. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.*, note 71a p. 388.

45. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.*, note 118g p.420. Without "discrediting" the idea of hierarchy, it is however difficult to distinguish it from inequality ; as Dumont himself rightly notes : the caste system indeed can be considered as "a general theory of 'inequality'" to which Hinduism as a religion, or as a symbolic system, gives it a clear meaning ; cf. *ibid.* p 266.

relationships of domination—, because the values of dharma, as universally asserted in Hinduism integrate all the castes in a unified and consensual Hindu universe. But, as Charles Malamoud recalls: "However one might rightly insist on underlining the difference between hierarchy and power, it is clear that, even in India, hierarchy only makes sense in terms of the domination which the superior exercizes over the inferior. One can question the nature of this domination, and seriously examine its justification, but this reality cannot be denied"[46].

Furthermore, one cannot forget that Brahmanism, at least in so far as it is expressed in scholarly texts, is fraught with internal contradictions. At stake are not only the "good" definition of dharma but also, more generally, what would be the most efficacious principles for classifying the Hindu world. In taking a viewpoint that one could call perspectivist, Charles Malamoud shows that between the three principal goals of mankind, the trivarga, i.e. dharma (order of the world), artha (economics and politics) and këma (sensual desire), there exists a hierarchy which is not at all absolute, but relative or, in Malamoud's words, a "revolving hierarchy"[47]. Malamoud's points out that different Brahmanic texts take different viewpoints with regard to the importance of one or the other of the three goals of mankind.

Dumont's method of purifying hierarchy consists of amputating it "from that with which hierarchy is usually mixed, namely power"[48], that is, of removing social determinants which would make hierarchy less pure. In effect, he reduces the concept of hierarchy to a simple intellectual principle, to a "logical structure" in which the value of truth would be independent from its universe of reference[49]. At the risk of giving an incompleted and biaised interpretation of Hinduism, one should not forget the lessons Durkheim and Mauss draw from their study on primitive classifications: "Instead of considering (...) that it is the logical relationships of things that have served as the basis of man's social relationships, in fact, the latter have served as a prototype for the former. The first logical categories were social categories (...). Thus, *logical hierarchy is but another aspect of the social hierarchy*"[50].

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46. C. Malamoud, "Le malencontre de La Boétie et les théories de l'Inde ancienne sur la nature de la société", in M. Abensour (ed.), *L'esprit des lois sauvages. Pierre Clastres ou une nouvelle anthropologie politique* (Paris : Ed. du Seuil, 1987), pp. 174-75.

47. Cf. C. Malamoud, "On the rhetoric and semantics of *puru≠ërtha*", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (New Series), vol.15, n°1-2, January-December 1981, pp. 33-54.

48. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.*, p.213.

49. Cf. L. Dumont, "Toward a Theory of Hierarchy", in *Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.*, pp. 239-245 ; and for a purely theoretical scholarly exercise, cf. S. Tcherkézoff, "La relation roi-prêtre en Inde selon Louis Dumont. Le modèle de l'inversion hiérarchique", in *Gradhiva*, n°14, 1993, pp. 65-85.

50. E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, "De quelques formes primitives de classification. Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives", in M. Mauss, *Œuvres*, 2 (Paris : Ed. de Minuit, 1968), pp.83-84. Moreover, to fully understand Louis Dumont's anthropology of India, one would have to consider the vision of the Muslim world that he proposes by

7. HINDUISM AND THE UNIVERSAL

In order to understand fully the position that "indigenous science" occupies in Dumont's anthropology, one must further analyse the cognitive status that Dumont gives to the egalitarian and hierarchical principles that structure his comparative sociology. These principles, Dumont affirms, "are facts, indeed they are amongst the most constraining facts, of political and social life", and thus they are two "universals", that is, two ways of expressing "the essence of man"[51]. But, Dumont adds: "the ideal of equality (...) is artificial. (...) It represents a deliberate denial of a universal phenomenon in a restricted domain"[52]. Is it thus possible to consider these two major values as equal manifestations of the "essential being of man"? If our understanding of Dumont is correct, the concept of hierarchy alone could be thought of as a "universal", egalitarian value having only a cultural and historical pretension to this claim. Actually, this is exactly Dumont's viewpoint. For him, "modern innovation"[53] arises from a universal heritage common to all societies, including Indian society. Thus, Dumont writes, to reveal the hierarchical principle which frame the Indian society, "teaches us something about the structure of common, non-modern, I am tempted to say, normal values"[54]. And sliding from the concept of "social totality" to the metaphysical notion of "Universal Totality", according to which the superior encompasses the inferior, Dumont asserts that "each particular configuration of ideas and values is embedded, along with all others, in a universal structure of which that configuration is but a partial expression"[55]. The "modern model", according to Dumont is thus "an exception arising from the general model, and [that] it remains embedded, or encompassed within this general one"[56]. Then, oscillating between a descriptive and a prescriptive viewpoint, he concludes that "hierarchy is universal", in fact, that "hierarchy is a universal necessity"[57]. Thus, Dumont who accepts the existence of historical and cultural roots for egalitarian values, denies these roots as regards the hierarchical principle, which alone represents for him "the essential being of man" because its origin is "within the nature of things"[58].

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contrasting an egalitarian Islam with a hierarchical Hinduism ; for a criticism of this viewpoint, cf. M. Gaborieau, *Ni Brahmanes ni ancêtres. Colporteurs musulmans du Népal* (Nanterre : Société d'ethnologie, 1993).

51. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op. cit.*, p.3 and p.10 (emphasis added).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

53. L. Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme*, *op. cit.*, p.23.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 248 (emphasis added).

55. *Ibid.*, p. 258 (emphasis added); on the idea of "the Universal Totality", as Guénon already said, cf. *Ibid.* p.196.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 259 (emphasis added).

57. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op. cit.*, p.237 (emphasis added).

58. L. Dumont, *Homo Æqualis*, *op. cit.*, p.199.

The comparative sociology that Dumont propounds raises a second kind of difficulty. According to Dumont, one must break with the individualist paradigm that dominates the social sciences in order to create a comparative "holistic" sociology grounded in the values which, for each society or culture, express its universal encompassing viewpoint[59]. However, it is difficult to understand how this approach can avoid reducing itself to the juxtaposition of the sort of cultural solipsisms which, at best, result from artificially contrasting two incommensurable systems of values: on the one hand, the "modern, Western, individualist universalism" which measures all cultures by its own specific values and, on the other hand, the "cultural holism" which should give rise to a different viewpoint on otherness[60]. By enclosing the debate in this set of radical alternatives, Dumont compels the anthropologist to transform his methodological and scientific choices into an ethico-political stance with regard to the highest philosophical values, preventing him from developing a true sociological understanding of social and cultural alterity[61]. The "methodological holism", as defined by Dumont, thus seems to lead to a generalized relativist viewpoint and, further still, to the possible justification of as many anthropologies as value systems discovered by anthropologists. Dumont's stance, in this regard, has been constantly the same since the debate of the 1960s: "It is impossible (...) altogether to subordinate universalism [to cultural holism] without destroying anthropology, and fantasies about a multiplicity of anthropologies corresponding to a multiplicity of cultures can be dismissed"[62].

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59. Cf. L. Dumont, "The Individual as an Impediment to Sociological Comparison and Indian History", in V.B. Singh and B. Singh (eds.), *Social and Economic Change . Essays in Honour of D.P. Mukherji* (Bombay : Allied Publishers, 1967), pp.227-268.

60. Cf. L. Dumont, *Essai sur l'individualisme, op. cit.*, p.192 sq.

61. This is what Dumont meant when he wrote : "I confess (...) my irenic [*irénique*] preference for (hierarchy)", in L. Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme, op. cit.*, p.261 (irenic, i.e. both peaceful and harmonious). Thus, it is not necessary to consider Dumont's work as a typical product of the "post-colonial Orientalist classificatory structures", as writes Nicholas B. Dirks, to understand Dumont's leaning towards hierarchy and non-modern societies ; cf. N.B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown. Ethno-history of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.404.

62. *Ibid* p. 199. In a debate with A.K. Saran in the 1960s, Dumont's position sounds like a forecast : "A Hindu sociology, said Dumont, is a contradiction in terms. (...) Sociology is one in its principle. (...) there will never be two sociologies, let alone a sociology of solipsism. (...) I have no doubt that the caste system as an important type of social experience has lessons in store for sociology as science, but this is subject to *its translation in the universal language of sociology*." L. Dumont, A Fundamental problem in the sociology of caste, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. n°9, December 1966, pp.23-24 (Dumont's emphasis).

8. "FUNDAMENTAL SCIENCE" AND "(CLASSICAL) SCIENCE"

To solve the logical deadlock inherent in his argument, Dumont has to analyse the nature of the universal to which he refers to and, in particular, to clarify the uses of reason in the scientific mode of thought. "Normatively, he writes, rationality and scientific laws are portrayed as the only truly universal, non-tautological propositions. Our problem is to locate ourselves with regard to this kind of rationality"[63]. Dumont's critique of rationalism and science participates less in an academic sociology of science than in a pedestrian philosophy marked by an ideological, anti-modern mood: he contrasts the ideas of "individualism" and "modernity" with what he considers as the "holist" values of traditional societies which preserve a harmonic vision of the universe by "subordinating man to the social totality"[64].

This argument deals with the dichotomy that scientific reason establishes between fact and values. In drawing an "absolute distinction between subject and object", in making an "illegitimate" division between "to be and to have to be" between "facts and values", writes Dumont, "modern thought" which as such "is exceptional"[65], and "individualism" in which modern thought participates, constitute both "the main obstacles in the study and understanding of non-modern societies"[66]. By uprooting man from the primary unity of "the order in which all things are given"[67], science, "which has a predominant position, a major function in modern ideology"[68], breaks the transcendental relationship that tradition establishes between man and the universe, the part and the totality, and it renders the world meaningless: "the destruction of the hierarchical cosmos"[69] thus makes the modern world "one deprived of values, (...) a subhuman world, a world of objects and of things, (...) a world without man"[70].

Concluding this half-established, nostalgic trend of thought, which is both vague and unclear[71], Dumont affirms: "Modern, scientific ideas being linked to the modern system of values (...) are often badly suited to the uses of anthropology and to sociological comparison"[72]. Because traditional societies unlike modern ones, do not separate facts and values, "there is no reason to impose this kind of

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63. L. Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme, op. cit.*, p. 207.
64. *Ibid.* p.192.
65. *Ibid.* p.221.
66. *Ibid.* p.202.
67. *Ibid.* p.240.
68. *Ibid.* p.249.
69. *Ibid.* p.208.
70. *Ibid.* p.255.
71. On the distinction between fact and value according to Weber, cf. C. Colliot-Thélène, *Le Désenchantement de l'Etat. De Hegel à Max Weber* (Paris : Ed. de Minuit, 1992).
72. L. Dumont, *Essais on individualisme, op. cit.*, p. 249.

complication, this kind of distinction, upon cultures which are not familiar with it": one will thus remain "closest to the true relationship prevailing in non-modern societies"[73]. Then Dumont inverts perspective and affirms: "the fundamental comparative model have to be the non-modern one"[74].

Compelled to conciliate two paradoxical viewpoints, the universalist claim of science and the radical critique of the values which compose it, Dumont devises for anthropology and, more generally, for the social sciences—if not for all the science—, a program aimed at restoring its lost, primordial, phantasmagorical state. In a prophetic mood Dumont writes: "One would rather see the vocation of anthropology, as well as *fundamental science*, in an inverse and complementary relationship to that of *(classical) science* and to modern ideology in general: re/unite, com/prehend, re/constitute that which one has separated, distinguished, decomposed"[75]. Anthropology would thus accomplish its redeeming mission: to "transcend" the modern world, "or rather to reintegrate it within the more human world which societies once had in common"[76]. Louis Dumont finally assignees to scholarship the task of restoring its object. In this way, scholarship would be reconciled with fundamental science or, in the words of René Guénon to whose thought Dumont's comparative sociology comes very close, "profane science" would be finally reintegrated into "traditional science", which is none other than "sacred science".

9. REPRESSION AND RESURGENCE

Using only biographical information already published in France in various magazines and journals, one can attempt to analyse Dumont's social and intellectual life-history in order to account for the successive choices which determined his scientific commitments. It is necessary to specify the conditions which favoured the way in which Dumont developed his anthropology and converted into legitimate academic terms ideological questionings of the intellectual and political field of the 1930s. The constraints involved in the institutional position held by Dumont in the field of social sciences, at the intersection of classical Indian studies and of social anthropology, contributed to the form his writing took. It became impossible for him to acknowledge, for himself and for others, how much his sociological vision of India owed to the trend of thought in the field of Indian studies which he had encountered during his youth but which had subsequently been repressed. In sketching the relationship between Dumont's work and his life-history, we can try to throw light on the intellectual and social conditions that allowed a progressive return

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73. *Ibid.*, p.221.

74. L. Dumont, *Homo Æqualis, op. cit.*, p.16.

75. L. Dumont, *Essais on individualisme, op. cit.*, p.209 (emphasis added).

76. *Ibid.*, p.257 and p.258.

of the previously repressed thematics. It was as if the resurgence of Guénonian-type questions became all the more apparent as Dumont's ideas were sufficiently converted into socio-philosophical generalities and distanced, with time, from their period of repression.

The first period "began by a youthful rebellion"[77] when Dumont in his twenties reacted with "revulsion to the bourgeois life" that was offered to him by the society and his family. This period was marked by a double rupture, social and scholarly, with the family project that destined him for the Ecole Polytechnique in the steps of the early deceased father of whom he was the only child. This rupture was both brutal and painful: his mother caused "a real scandal" and "cast him out." Difficult years of alternating unemployment and petty jobs followed. These were nonetheless formative years, during which Dumont "imbibed René Guénon's picture of India, and of the Vedanta in particular, as the perfection of 'traditionalism'" while he was "moving on the fringes between old-fashioned existentialism and surrealism"[78].

A second period began in the middle of the 1930s with the encounter with George-Henri Rivière and Dumont's entrance, "completely by chance" and "through a back door", to the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (Museum of the Popular Arts and Traditions), at first to "stick photographs", and as a simple secretary "to type the mail of the Museum". The social and intellectual conditions surrounding Dumont's modest beginnings in the scholarly world, contrast with the importance he retrospectively attributed to his years of apprenticeship. From an objective as well a subjective point of view, Dumont's academic career took root at this point. He first oriented himself toward art history and the Celtic world, which was one of Marcel Mauss's interest, before being attracted by social anthropology. "Everything began in 1936-37", said Dumont. During these years, he discovered his "vocation as an ethnographer", participating actively in the daily work of the Museum, listening to the teachings of Marcel Mauss, and meeting Claude Lévi-Strauss then a young professor of philosophy, newly returned from Brazil, but already preparing his masterpiece on kinship. Probably, Lévi-Strauss represented for

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77 Cf. "Louis Dumont, la culture de l'individualisme", Interview with François Ewald, in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, octobre 1991, pp. 114-119.

78. L. Dumont, "On the Comparative Understanding of Non-Modern Civilizations", *Daedalus*, Spring 1975, p.166. To my knowledge, Dumont refered for the first time to Guénon in this article. Dumont occasionally made other references to Guénon in various interviews ; cf. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* (Special issue on Dumont), tome XXII, 1984, n°68, p. 31 and p 157. In his most recent interview given to a journalist in Paris, Louis Dumont omitted to mention René Guénon while he emphasized his relationships with the communists in the 1930s, as well as his participation in the *Collège de Sociologie*, led at that time by Roger Caillois, Georges Bataille, Raymond Queneau and Michel Leiris ; cf. "Entretien avec Louis Dumont", *Le Monde*, 23-24 Avril 1995. However, in the 1930s, Guénon was widely read both by members of the nationalist right, such as Drieu La Rochelle, and by intellectuals close to the Communist Party, like Raymond Queneau for exemple.

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Dumont a living example of an anthropologist, and fostered the development of his own "vocation"[79].

During World War II, Dumont spent several years as a prisoner of War in Hamburg. During this time he studied Sanskrit with the German Indologist Walter Schubring (to whom he dedicated in the 1960s, *La civilisation indienne et nous. Esquisse de sociologie comparée—Indian Civilization and Us. Outline of a Comparative Sociology*). This experience constituted for Dumont a decisive break with his pre-war youth. From that time onward, his earlier intellectual and social links were abandoned in a process of selective oblivion that characterizes his memory. Coming back from captivity, Dumont turned decisively toward the study of Indian culture. In the years immediately following the war, he was able to carry out substantial field work in South India. After having taught briefly at Oxford, where he completed his anthropological training, meeting the masters of British anthropology, he was elected in 1955, Director of Studies in the VIth Section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (today the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*), a post he occupied until he retired.

The research that Dumont conducted until the end of the 1950s constitutes his first ethnographic work. His study of the *Tarasque*, a popular festival in the South of France, his monograph dealing with a low caste, the Pralamalai-Kallar, in Tamilnad (South India), and his research on kinship, all works appeared, according to Dumont, as highly technical studies, strongly influenced by the methodologies then prevalent in the French field of social anthropology: the privilege given to a monographic approach, the importance accorded to material culture, and the strictly structuralist framework, particularly in the study of kinship. These empirical studies allowed Louis Dumont to root his ethnographic scholarship in a solid field experience, before turning his thoughts toward conceptualizing a model of Indian culture and society.

Homo Hierarchicus and various associated essays published in the 1960s constitute the second period of his work, a period characterized by a shift from a local ethnographic viewpoint to a more general sociological view of the Indian culture. Dumont embarked upon a process of conceptualization which lent itself more easily than his earlier research to a return to Guénon's ideas and notions. But the intellectual and social conditions which informed Dumont's work at that time, prevented any direct expression of the Guénonian vision of India and of the traditional world in *Homo Hierarchicus*. We can distinguish at least three reasons for this self censorship: first, because the anthropological facts on which the book is based are not at all part of Guénon's universe: second, because *Homo Hierarchicus* was conceived and written within the most legitimate academic institution (EPHE,

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79. As a contemporary, Claude Lévi-Strauss was also a rival to Louis Dumont in the academic field. It is a fact that even today, Lévi-Strauss is the only anthropologist routinely mentioned alongside with Dumont in various essays dealing with the masters of French anthropology ; cf. Dominique Casajus, "Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Dumont. Portraits médiatiques", in *Gradhiva*, 1993, n°14, pp. 87-94.

VIth Section) at that time in the field of social sciences in France: and third, because in the 1960s, the intellectual circumstances were dominated both by the structuralist paradigm elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, and by a strong Marxist trend, particularly exemplified by Louis Althusser. Dumont constantly criticized the "superficial views" on Indian civilization of those scholars who defended a "materialist viewpoint on society and history"[80]. In this way, his structuralist commitment can be understood as a way of liberating his mind, according to his own words, "both from idealism and from materialism"[81]. In fact, Dumont could not escape from this imaginary antinomy: his structuralist stance favoured the expression of an essentialist vision of the Indian society, albeit cast in apparently neutral epistemological terms. The external determinations which structured the field of social sciences in which Dumont's anthropology evolved, made unacceptable, from a purely scholarly point of view, any reference to René Guénon, an essayist belonging to a school of thought illegitimate in the eyes of academic scholars.

It is in these social and intellectual circumstances, that one must understand Dumont's uses of Tocqueville in *Homo Hierarchicus*. The reference to this author, whose academic legitimacy was still weak at the beginning of the 1960s, particularly among the sociologists of the Durkheimian school, appeared, indeed, if not paradoxical, at least discordant in the epistemological field in which Dumont operated: "I was an ethnologist: I appealed to Mauss and other students of Durkheim, but Tocqueville was unknown to the sociologists as well as to the ethnologists. Where the devil could I have got the idea to resort to Tocqueville? How did I discover him"[82]? Dumont wonders. That in all probability it was Raymond Aron who provided the opportunity for this discovery, doesn't help us to understand the marginal yet essential position that Tocqueville holds in Dumont's work. In effect, Tocqueville furnished the intellectual mediation Dumont required for his unconscious restatement, in legitimate academic terms, of the comparative sociology of the relation between traditional societies and the modern world which he inherited from Guénon.

Tocqueville and Guénon express, a century apart and each in his own fashion, a worldview shadowed by the French Revolution and by nostalgia for the *Ancien Régime*. They share, in part, a similar approach to the philosophy of Western history and a similar vision of the social world, in terms of binary schemes opposing "old" and "new", "tradition" and "modernity", "castes" and "classes", "elites" and "masses". These oppositions can be endlessly generated, by combining terms ("democracy" and "castes" for example), the resulting topoi have more to do with political and journalistic rhetoric than with scholarly thought.

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80. L. Dumont, *La civilisation indienne est nous. Esquisse de sociologie comparée* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1964), p. 76.

81. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, *op. cit.*, note 1a p. 344.

82. L. Dumont, "Tocqueville et le respect de l'autre", in *Esprit*, n°129-130, August-September 1987, pp. 2-3.

The long citations from Tocqueville with which Dumont begins Homo Hierarchicus[83] deal with the rise of individualism and the correlative decay of traditional relationships of solidarity between classes which characterize the Ancien Régime. Tocqueville expresses, in a mood that one hardly dares to call "aristocratic", the reaction of an elite stripped of its political and symbolic prerogatives and left hanging in a social world which no longer recognizes the values of excellence previously its distinctive character. The fear raised by the mixtures of classes (or of castes) otherwise "quite distinct and immobile", the apprehension "that the social positions would become equal", and the correlative obsession with the "levelling" of classes, typify the social fantasies expressed by traditionalist thinkers. The same ideas appears in the writings of Guénon, particularly in La Crise du Monde Moderne, but without benefit of scholarly legitimacy.

Finally, the vision of world history that Tocqueville and Guénon share is rooted in a comparative view that puts in perspective the concept of tradition (the aristocratic ideal for Tocqueville, the hierarchy of caste for Guénon) with regard to modernity (i.e. for both, democratic equality). India represents for Guénon humanity's "normal" past (as it does for Louis Dumont), America for Tocqueville exemplifies the future of democracy, which, unlike Guénon, he does his part to defend (as Louis Dumont defends it). In this connection it is paradoxical to see Dumont postulate a direct relationship between Tocqueville and Mauss, whereas he had previously recognized the heterogeneity of the intellectual domains to which these two thinkers belong. "That which one could call Tocqueville's introverted reflection" writes Dumont, "entirely foreshadowed ours which, for the most part, was drawn from the teaching of Mauss"[84]. In view of the utter disgrace which struck Guénon in the field of Indian studies in the 1950s—"that man who introduced the tone of *Gringoire* into metaphysics"[85]—it is understandable that Tocqueville's ideas could have occurred to Dumont's mind almost spontaneously, and offered him a suitable vehicle for expressing in terms acceptable to and recognized by academia, ideas derived from a source which he could not cite because his self censorship as well as the internal censorship, in analytical term, within the academic field.

In Dumont's subsequent essays devoted to the birth of individualism, themes which are in resonance with Guénonian ideology on science and reason, otherwise unfamiliar to Tocqueville, reappear in a clearer and more general fashion. These essays constitute a third period in Dumont's work. The focus is on the history of Western ideas rather than on the sociological study of its roots. They accompany

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83. Cf. excerpts from *De la démocratie en Amérique*, by A. de Tocqueville, cited by L. Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus, op.cit.*, pp. 17-18.

84. L. Dumont, "Tocqueville et le respect de l'autre", *loc. cit.*, p. 3.

85. Cited in *René Guénon et l'actualité de la pensée traditionnelle*, Actes du Colloque international de Cerisy-la-Salle (1973), (Milan : Archè, 1980), p. 52. In the 1930s, *Gringoire* was a widely read extreme right newspaper, famous for its violent antisemitic and its antimarxist stances.

Dumont's abrupt abandonment of Indian studies in the years following the events of May 1968. This last break in his intellectual career signals Dumont's progressive return to the intellectual universe of his youth: the genesis of individualism and the comparison between traditional and modern societies. Developments in the French cultural field in which Dumont by then had achieved considerable recognition, also favoured resurgence of his earlier ideas.

Dumont's work is the logical fruit of an autonomous process that owes nothing to fashionable trends of the marketplace for "cultural goods". Nonetheless, one cannot understand the interest his writings on individualism and modernity have generated in intellectual circles far afield from Indianist research, without taking into account the new ideological debates which developed in this marketplace from the end of the 1970s. The emergence of a new category of producers of "symbolic goods" located at the intersection of the academic field and journalism, led to a reversal of ideological themes[86]. These new kind of cultural intermediaries emerged primarily from literary and philosophical disciplines, but, working also, for example, as columnists in prestigious magazines and newspapers, they shared many common values with social actors located at the poles of economic and political power. They developed a global criticism of what they scornfully labelled "*La* Pensée 68"[87] (*The 68 Mindset*). Strongly opposed to a "philosophy of structures" and, more generally, to social sciences which they reduced to the application of Marxist and structuralist schemes, these writers preached the restoration of the eternal themes of the spiritualist philosophical tradition, those of humanism and morality (or ethics). For them, the individual or the subject should be the producers of "new values" in accordance with "the Rights of Man". The 1980s saw a proliferation of writings, debates and conferences: for example, *Collège international de philosophie*[88], *Espace séminaire du Centre Georges-Pompidou*[89], the reviews *Esprit*[90] and *Le Débat*, and various forums in major daily and weekly journals, which dealt with modernity and individualism. This intellectual ferment contributed to the rename of Louis Dumont who brought to these ideological debates the support and legitimacy of his erudition as a scholar. The critique of the instrumental forms and techniques of (Western) reason that Dumont developed fitted well with trends of thought

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86. Cf. especially, L. Pinto, "La *doxa* intellectuelle", in *Actes de la recherche en science sociales*, n°90, December 1991, pp. 95-100 and, by the same author, "Le journalisme philosophique", *Actes de la recherche en science sociales*, n°101-102, March 1994, pp. 25-38

87. L. Ferry and A. Renaut, *La Pensée 68. Essai sur l'antihumanisme contemporain* (Paris. Gallimard, 1985), reprinted in collection "Folio Essais", 1988.

88. Cf. A. Renaut, "Sur l'individualisme", paper read at the *Collège international de philosophie*, Paris, May 15, 1987.

89. Cf. D. Coppet, "The Society as an Ultimate Value and the Socio-Cosmic Configuration", paper read at *L'espace séminaire philosophie et anthropologie* : "Relativisme-universalisme-holisme-individualisme-hiérarchie", *Centre Georges-Pompidou*, Paris, April 26-28 1989, reprinted in *Ethnos*, 1990, n°3-4, pp. 140-150.

90 Cf. for exemple, the issue of *Esprit*, February 1978, dedicated to Louis Dumont.

shared, both, by heirs of the traditionalist and rightist ideologies of the 1930s[91], and some supporters of analytical philosophy, as well as currents of "post-modern" deconstructionism.

Many writings published in the 1980s, at the same time as Louis Dumont's essays on individualism which appeared in 1983, helped to define these years as a "return" to an individualist viewpoint of the social world, whether by Gilles Lipovetsky[92], Alain Minc[93], Luc Ferry or Alain Renaut[94]. These authors involved in the celebration of Dumont, were often unaware of his work on India. Even if they sometimes severely criticized his philosophical gaps or his traditionalist stance, they could not bypass Dumont dealing with individualism and modernity. Thus, Alain Renaut devotes the second chapter of his book to "Louis Dumont or the triumph of the individual". He qualifies the "exciting genesis of modernity" elaborated by this "masterful comparativist" as a "return to Ithaca, cast in the language of an extraordinary odyssey of the mind"[95]. At the same time, the legitimate philosopher who is Alain Renaut, reminds the anthropologist of the gaps in his self-taught philosophical culture[96]: even more, Renaut emphasizes, to his great regret, "the antimodern adherence to the values of holism" in which Dumont participates, as well as his "apocalyptic vision of modernity of which contemporary thought is particularly fond"[97]. Pierre Rosanvallon's article "Louis Dumont, le sacre de l'individu"[98] (Louis Dumont, the consecration of the individual), illustrates the political rhetoric of the media (in this case *Libération*, the leading leftist daily) for which the Dumontian language is useful in times of uncertainty. According to Rosanvallon, Louis Dumont's comparative sociology "leads to a philosophical viewpoint" since it questions, no less than "the principle of the unity of mankind". In Rosanvallon's reading of Dumont: as a human science, "anthropology is confronted with the "dilemma" between "relativism" on the one hand, and the "imperialist" universalist viewpoint on the other. "The framework outlined by

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91. For a reading of Dumontian theses by the "New Right", cf. P. Bérard, "Louis Dumont: "Anthropologie et modernité"", in *La Nouvelle Ecole*, n°39, November 1982, pp. 95-115. In other respects, the popularity of René Guénon is attested by the reprinting in pocket book form of *La Crise du monde moderne* (Paris : Gallimard, coll. "Folio Essais", 1994) and by its translation today, in the countries of Eastern Europe (Hungary and Russia, for exemple).

92. G. Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide. Essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris : Gallimard, 1983).

93. A. Minc, *La machine égalitaire* (Paris : Grasset, 1987).

94. L. Ferry and A. Renaut, *68-86. Itinéraires de l'individu* (Paris : Gallimard, 1987); A. Renaut, *L'Ère de l'individu. Contribution à une histoire de la subjectivité* (Paris : Gallimard, 1989).

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 71 et 73.

96. On Fichte in particular, cf. *ibid.*, p. 94.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

98. *Libération*, November 17, 1983, reprinted in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, tome XXII, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151.

Dumont allows us" to reconsider both "individualism and state socialism" as well as "ideas about equality and justice". Dumont, Rosanvallon continues, help us "to leave behind Keynesianism and, moreover, to reorient modernity": he brings us "finally, to our present and most urgent questionings"[99].

Louis Dumont deserves credit for having reintroduced into current public debate important questions arising from his research and reflection on Indian culture and society. The recognition he eventually found as his audience widened is not however without paradox. Is it not a singular misinterpretation of the work of this anthropologist to make him an advocate of individualism? As Alain Renaut rightly notes, Louis Dumont has never hidden his commitment to traditional values, even at the cost of "several extraordinary denials"[100].

99. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
100. A. Renaut, *L'Ère de l'individu, op. cit.*, p. 91.

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THE INDIANISM AND THE COMPARATIVE THEORY OF LOUIS DUMONT

The Construction of the "Object" in Anthropology *

Jackie ASSAYAG

> " When one looks for the origin of
> a myth, one finds another myth. "
> Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Anthropological theory has, since the nineteenth century, gone hand in glove with the practice of venturing elsewhere, that is to say, to a point which is geographically, morally and socially distant from one's own region, understood in both cultural and theoretical senses. Gathering its facts in the wake of European colonial expansion, the science of the *Other* was by definition "exotic". And, the longer, harsher and more wearying the voyage, the more the *Others* resembled preserved samples of humanity from the exterior world, being so many forms of captive otherness from "fields" with which cultural interface was considered after the fashion of an "iron cage"—on condition that the patient face-to-face of the ethnologist with his "savages" provided the key.

Thus, prolonged "immersion" in smaller, more simple, truly elementary societies was commended. The ethnologist, once his linguistic apprenticeship had been completed, attained there tropical or desert mirages, not without eventual

physical injuries, along with agonies caused by exile or the bedazzled vertigo arising of the feeling of strangeness, the heroic certainty of discovering cultural traits, themselves elementary. Evidence leading one to forget that "facts are impregnated with theory", as theories are with facts[1]; while, upon return, the process of writing induced the ethnologist to circumscribe "his" territory of study, as well as to consider procedures, both narrative and theoretical, which adequately filtered the regional "materials".

Today, a dominant current of anthropology has reduced the exploration of different modalities of otherness to a single, narcissistic region: the reflexive "being there" of the observed observer. An occasion to give oneself over to an introspective orgy, disclosing the postures and "styles" which ethnologists assume in the "fieldwork". Although initially cleansing, this type of (self-)analysis accommodatingly supports itself with the contemporary myth of interiority and with a textuality which, ultimately, obscures hierarchy: Does the scene of Malinovski's arrival on the Pacific Islands, which is certainly reminiscent of Conrad, have as much importance as the analyses of the *kula* economic cycle? And, should the subject-cum-ethnographer, rather than his "object", or theory and epistemology, become the sole object of ethnology (Fardon 1990: 20)?

One would, however, expect of the anthropologist that he first render an account of the cultural Other who bears witness to the diversity of the human condition; that he explains the singularity of the encountered exteriority; that he reveals the nature of kinship, gift-giving, caste and state, specifying according to case that the first is classificatory, the second a question of honour or shame, the third linked with hierarchy, while the latter is related to filial piety. Incidentally, no anthropologist directly addresses all of these questions, if only because it is a matter of making one's name by associating it with a geographical zone or an ethnic group merged from that moment with the nature of a problem: Evans-Pritchard with his Nuers and their segmentary social structure.

Considering the disciplinary field circumscribed by the anthropological community, each place or "object" of study is thus open to becoming an exemplary *topos*. Certainly, such a procedure renews the specificity of the approach and ensures internal critical discussion. However, its systematic character tends to reify the so-called "cultural areas" of the world by suggesting the vision of humanity distributed in hierarchical strata. In fact, this taxonomy, which is both evolutionary and geographical, has often been assimilated into a data-bank used as a conceptual tool-box from which all anthropologists might draw. At the same time, a few local

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1. Regarding this expression and the calling into question of the distinction between observation and theory, fact and value, one may refer to the discussion by Putnam (1984: 223ff.).

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realia (*"hau"*, *"varna"*, *"tabu"*, *"mana"*, etc.)—decontextualised and generalised in favour of "family resemblances"—were sublimated in notions characterising the theoretical subsets of the discipline: theories of exchange, caste, of interdiction and of magic.

1. ANTHROPOLOGY AND INDIANISM

Obviously, matters are not quite so simple, for several reasons which stem at the same time from the nature of the profession and from regional specialisation.

First, because, contrary to the heroic gesture and low methodological profile of earlier dispensation, the "fieldwork" is a mixture of accidents and necessities retrospectively transformed when compiled. Following the horizon of expectation prior to the voyage is, in fact, the accommodation *in situ* of the allogeneous—itself stylised by tradition—which reorganises the reception group. Crucible for the problematisation, in a contingent manner, of the relationship between local knowledge and metropolitan or national theories[2], to which the anthropologist owes both his intellectual formation and his choice of destination.

In the second case, because the authority of the anthropologist is no doubt measured less according to his scrupulous investigative qualities *in situ*, than in relation to his speculative faculty for eluding them, notably his ability to increase his audience among colleagues who do not share the same cultural area. Thus, for example, having shown the singular complexity of Indian castes, and thereby having demonstrated the expertise required by his study, any attempt to export the notion outside this field is seen to be disqualified in advance[3]. At the same time, one reserves for oneself the right, legitimatised by a simple operation of inversion, to make of it the hierarchic mirror of Occidental egalitarianism. Although founded on a *petitio principii*, this theorisation is very productive: it confirms the expertise in and by the two fields.

If by chance the "field" is already occupied—consider so-called "complex" societies or "great" literate civilsations—the anthropologist faces the dilemma of absorption or exclusion. Arriving in India subsequent to local, already established "intellectuals" (missionaries, administrators and Orientalists), the anthropologist feels the need to make himself known. For, regarding the edifying and curious knowledge elaborated by the former and the impeccable knowledge accumulated by

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2. Regarding the question of national traditions in the discipline, one may consult the special number of the journal *Ethos*, " The Sharing of National Anthropologies " (1982).

3. Consider the expeditious manner in which Dumont (1979) responded to Meillassoux by referring him to his (Africanist) domain (1974).

the latter, in order to confirm one's legitimacy, it is better to annex than to dismiss that knowledge. Borne by the hope to win over the exegetes, the anthropologist endeavours to incorporate the scholarly material in an attempt to overturn the hierarchic relation among disciplines. This necessitates a re-definition of the field of investigation, of its coherence and extension, in such a manner that the discipline, rebaptised "Indianism", will thus subsume the study of civilisation in its entirety: "India is a whole", wrote Dumont (1957: 10)[4].

As regards India, this pursuit of conquest is accompanied by a twofold exclusion: vis-à-vis Muslim culture, on the one hand, the expansion of which on the subcontinent nevertheless covered almost one thousand years—it concerns today one eighth of the population, or 120 million individuals, not less than one third of the world's Islam community (without counting Bangladesh and Pakistan); then, on the other hand, respective of the large contingent of historians and their auxiliaries, paleographers, epigraphists and archaeologists, who have the task of diffusing the peremptory stereotype according to which South Asia was, and remains, indifferent to history: "Indian civilisation being unhistorical by definition", as Dumont wrote (1979: 143)[5].

Such a project of internal reconfiguration of disciplines would remain *flatus voci* if it were not supported by a restoration. Putting forward, for example, the specific and academically under-evaluated disregard of a cultural form, that of the "caste system" with which the society under study would be merged. Not only does that system crystallize regional quintessence, but it explains its historicity by serving, furthermore, as the sole instance of validation. Thus, a (self-)proclaimed expert on caste, the Indianist consequently sees only caste. A new tautology. For, an analysis which infers particular observations from general conclusions can only put to the test those very particulars which enabled their construction.

By transforming the caste system to a norm which justifies comparative theory (even though it issued thereof[1]), one attributes to it an anteriority, if not a superiority, which confers on India an equivocal status, both as (holistic) model and (regional) expression of the perennial and universal principle which hierarchy is. In fact, as soon as one speaks of India in anthropology, one evokes caste or invokes hierarchy, while sociology convokes the caste system only to illustrate the nature, or

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4. On the other hand, one may read the article by Burghart (1983), who insists on the plurality and complexity of India.

5. A statement to which is opposed the approach of Cohn (1987c. 209), who discerned periods in the successive sociological representations of India constructed by the British coloniser: from 1750 to 1810, a despotic political order to justify the conquest; from 1810 to 1850, an organisation of villages (and castes) as so many small republics; from 1860 to 1910, a feudal society so as to substitute imperial sovereignty; from 1910 to 1947, an arena of groups conspiring against the English as a response to the struggle for independence.

the blueprint, of hierarchic society. Other than the fact that this placement under the seal of exception renders other cultural facets, not less essential to Indian society, indistinct[6], it results in making South Asia a peripheral intellectual object in the field of anthropology—a matter for Indianists, as is said!

The anthropology of the subcontinent cannot, however, always be epitomised as that of caste, as a cursory historical overview shows[7]. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Seligman worked among the Veddas of Ceylon (1907-1908), after his studies in Melanesia and before those carried out among the Nubas and the Ainus. Rivers, for his part, went among the Todas (1901-1902), also subsequent to "fieldwork" in Melanesia. As for Radcliffe-Brown, he began his career among the Andamans (1907-1908), before visiting the aborigines of Australia (Stocking 1983: 83). If none of these anthropologists had the impression of being exclusively concerned with Indians or Asians, it is without doubt because all had come to India in search of "tribes", to be understood as: vestiges of primitive man.

One generation later, comparative sociologists, such as Redfield and Lewis, chose to direct their attention to the peasantry. However, they did not find it to be particularly Indian. But for a few cultural traits, it ultimately appeared to be for them only an example of the type universally diffused over the globe: that of traditional society (Burghart 1990: 260). It was only towards the 1950s that the anthropology of India became "Indianist", a reserve and empire, both regional and cognitive, exclusively for members of this professional caste. The transformation was contemporary with the appearance of monographs on villages[8], all inspired by that (on the Coorgs) by Srinivas (1952), supervised by Radcliffe-Brown and advised by Evans-Pritchard, and then Fortes and Gluckman. It was, therefore, with the support of Africanists that caste was raised to the status of a fundamental category in anthropology[9].

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6. For a presentation of the rich and multiple aspects of popular Hinduism, made possible by the recentring of the notion of caste, one may read Fuller (1992); *cf.* the critical commentaries by Assayag (1994).

7. Other than the periodisation of the social sciences in India by Cohn (*cf.* note 3 *supra*), one may consult those of Lardinois (1988) and Srinivas (1992) who also take account of work by Indian authors.

8 Since 1957, Dumont inscribed himself both in and against this orientation (defended notably by Srinivas), denying that the village would be, contrary to the caste system, a sociological unit pertinent to the study of Indian society (1957c).

9. It being understood that the tradition of Orientalism contributed in its manner to the promotion of the notion of caste (Inden 1986; 1990; Dirks 1989).

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2. ARCHAEOLOGY OF A REGIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: HIERARCHY

We shall forego here the task of compiling an inventory, today impressive, of criticism addressed at Dumont's systematic attempt to define India fundamentally as an hierarchic apotheosis (Marriott 1969; Kolenda 1976; Lynch 1977; Srinivas 1984; Quigley 1993), and content ourselves to offer, in the form of a regressive history, a few reflections on the manner in which his main work, *Homo Hierarchicus*[10], simultaneously constructs the knowledge of its object and the object of its knowledge. One possible genealogy among others: a work is never studied in all its ramifications, especially when it ensues of a comparative will which belongs to a "labyrinth of interactions", to use a curious expression which Feyerabend (1979: 14) borrowed from Butterfield.

So as to elucidate the construction of the Dumontian model, markedly French and structural in the 1960s and 1970s, we shall give greater place to the selection and the conceptual transfer which presided over the elaboration of a thought progressing by successive rectifications and generalisations. A thought which is all the more exemplary in that by invoking "experiences in the field"—it is really more mental than supported by the latter, even though the ethnographer undertook to stay for a long period in the South (1953) and more briefly in North India—it is coupled with a comparative sociological project on modernity which is both rigorous and ambitious.

The history of a great idea is, in any case, always more ingenious than its interpreter would imagine. This includes that which, behind an original intuition, inspired by precocious reading, detects an unnoticed reference lodged in the pantheon of the masters of sociology. Contrary to expectations, the "traditionalist", René Guénon[11] provided in part the sophisticated intellectual editing represented by *Homo Hierarchicus*, which undermined the meticulous analyses of the tutelary precursors Marx, Weber and de Tocqueville. Is this otherwise surprising? Does not every work have as condition the effacing of the boundary between "science" and "non-science", notably that indispensable prerequisite of the creative process which constitutes what the epistemologist G. Holton calls *thêmata*, "presuppositions" or "thematic hypotheses" (1981)?

Whatever its grandeur—and as far as one confronts what "social scientists" say is to be done with what they, in reality, do -, any speculative product results of such an intellectual *bricolage*, and this is said without wishing to be pejorative, even should it be learnedly controlled as in the case of Dumont, who extracts and grafts with circumspection. The abundant footnotes and the ample bibliography of *H.H.*

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10. This work will henceforth be designated by its initials, *H.H.*
11. A reference discovered concurrently by Lardinois (1995).

attest to this, although the author has provided in interviews given on several occasions (1972; 1981; 1984; 1991; Galey 1982) such elements as would enable one to trace a less academic bibliography.

2.1. Paris, Val d'Aoste, Oxford[12]

It is certainly in the work of Bouglé—the first recognised precursor of *H.H.* (1966: 8)—upon which the Dumontian architecture is founded. Less, moreover, for reasons mentioned by the author, after the beginning of his positive exposition "from system to structure" (1966: chap. II)—he borrows from Bouglé the initial definition of the caste system: separation, hierarchy and interdependence (1966: 64)—, than because India and his hierarchic argument retrospectively mark an episode of long-term reflection: that of an archaeology of Occidental ideology, egalitarian and individualistic. In such a way that Dumont's entire work follows, but in inverse direction, the path of this member of the Durkheimian school, interested as he was in the "relation of ideas to social structures" (Vogt 1979: 130).

In effect, if Bouglé began by exploring the type of social conditions capable of influencing the appearance and diffusion of *Les Idées égalitaires*(1899), it was only later, and then only to the purpose of validating his conclusions, that he turned to India in his *Essai sur le régime des castes* (1900; 1908). Although he never visited the country—and such a voyage would without doubt have repulsed him—, he found in India morphological characteristics diametrically opposed to those which underlie egalitarianism. In Bouglé's radically partisan view, the confrontation with this "mental experience" of hierarchic quintessence on the subcontinent corroborated the superiority of the Occident, on the intellectual as well as moral planes (as understood in the nineteenth century).

Conversely, Dumont attributes a much greater ideologic-political coherence to the hierarchic model, for which he delivered a paradoxical eulogy. Consider, for instance, his interpretations of "the totalitarian malady" (1983: 141), of racism (1966: 320-322), of nationalism and "communalism" (1966: 377ff) which menaced alone modern societies, defined as essentially individualistic, to be understood as where "holism" appears through the refusal of hierarchy. This, in short, is a manner of suggesting that a choice must be made between violence and hierarchy!

The notion of "holism", of great importance to Dumont, assumes meanings which are both axiological in nature and a matter of principle. His employment oscillates between the idea of totality, inspired by Hegel, and the methodological conception as developed by Mauss following the *Années Sociologiques*. While the

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12. Some factual and biographical information was derived from the dictionary of Bonte & Izard (1991), and a few tracks have been recorded in Appadurai (1988) and Burghart (1990).

first meaning is apparently idealistic, the return which Dumont made to the *Sturm und Drang* thought of Herder, for whom all cultures with an equal right are "collective individuals" (1983: 119), concretises and confirms it, by way of the "Germano-nationalist" thought of Fichte and Schlegel (*id.*: 123), a manifestly ideological sense. Such a genealogy enabled him to oppose this "social organicism" to French contractual universalism, heritage of both Rousseau and the Revolution (1986: 24). Although fashioned at the dawn of a philosophy of history constructed explicitly for comparative theory, this typology resulted in an (inter-national) topology: India and Germany, recognised as "holistic" (and traditional) are contrasted with France, seen as individualistic and modern.

The second meaning is, for its part, strictly speaking instrumental. It was inspired by the *"Instructions d'ethnographie descriptive"*, a course taught by Mauss from 1926 to 1949 at the Institute of Ethnography which he, with Lévy-Bruhl and Rivet, was founder. Published in 1947, the *Manuel d'ethnographie*, both introduction and research programme, bore witness to an original effort, the ultimate aim of which was the comprehension of the social totality. It was a question of considering "the facts in their relation to the whole of the social body of which they are a part", for "social facts only derive meaning from their place in a concrete totality which is, in good logic and in theory, society and the ensemble of its institutions (Karady 1968: XLIV). It was this project which was initially tested in the "field" by Hertz, who, among the Durkheimians, was to the greatest extent an anthropologist, in his monograph on the local cult of Saint Besse, at Cogne in the Val d'Aoste (1912).

The undertaking becomes increasingly complex as it refers to an interaction of mirrored references. If, in effect, sociological holism "phenomenologises", as one might say, the Hegelian totality by evoking the notion of the "spirit of the people" (*Volksgeist*), it also denotes an *"ethos"* which, this time, peers from Weber's side without, however, attaining to the nominalism of the "ideal type". As much as he is Indianist, Dumont is Maussian: he implements methodological holism which was, he asserts, determinant in the maturation of his thought (1972). However, as comparatist, his holism becomes ethical since he studies the configuration of values which brings him nearer to the "Radcliffe-Brownian heritage" (1983: 224). Furthermore, to the extent that German idealistic philosophy is re-read from the structuro-functionalist perspective of Evans-Pritchard—heir to Roberton Smith's Orientalist anthropology of Arabian societies (Beidelman 1968)—, it should be remembered that the Oxford Africanist paid tribute to the *Années Sociologiques* by writing the preface for Hertz's *Mélanges* in 1960. Dumont claims that this transpired through his influence, although this detail is disputed (1983: 211, n. 16). Hertz—the brilliant combatant, "victim of the bloody and useless attack" by Marceville-en-Woêvre, as Mauss respectfully wrote—was keen on (Indonesian and) Polynesian materials. This was no doubt the reason for which Dumont studied them parallel to

the materials collected by Hocart, who, let us recall, liked to compare Polynesia and ancient India. A refracted reading enriched by Dumont through the contribution of Roman law, which Maine, in consideration of his comparatist enterprise, elaborated by contrasting it to the Hindu judicio-religious continent.

It is this wealth of geo-intellectual circulation which we now propose to describe, before showing how Dumont grafted it onto a few *thêmata* issuing of the crisis during the s which he admits to having traversed (1981: XVI).

2.2. Berlin, Sudan and Arabia, the Veda and Rome

As noted above, Dumont recognised in Hegel, from whose *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* he quotes at length in a note, "the principle of the system in abstract *difference*" (1966: 63), that is to say, the idea that the totality of articulated elements, which are the castes, must be encompassed. According to the Dumontian interpretation: hierarchy among castes is a relational phenomenon within the totality which society comprises. However, this borrowing neglects its dialectical counterpart. In fact, when Hegel thinks of the Orient, it is more often in the manner, less structural than nostalgic, of a living museum of a form of social holism which the Occident has lost, like China, as one reads in the opening of the second section of *The Philosophy of History* (1956: 139). This point, to which we shall return, should be kept in mind.

As is explained in *H.H.*, but also in the preface to the French translation of Evans-Pritchard's work on *The Nuers* (1968), it was in Sudan that Dumont discovered the segmentary principle at work in the system of Indian castes: "caste is not a niche or a block but is generally subdivided, at least at a primary level, into different subcastes, and there are often many further subdivisions" (1966: 85). Dumont opposes this tendency towards fissiparity to the unity of democratic societies in which the egalitarian bond prevails, conforming to the teaching of Bouglé (1908: 20), without, however, expressing, as does the latter, his dislike of it. The main interest in importing to India this kinetic mechanism of scission and fusion which accords to the groups only a structurally relative signification, qualified by the Africanist as "well-ordered anarchy" (Evans-Pritchard 1968: 210-211), is not restricted to a question of social morphology. To the extent that the segmentary system implies the existence of an administrative, juridical and military organisation, he explains the absence of state and, consequently, the prevalence of political weakness in Africa. To which Dumont adds: as in India, a country which was "condemned to political instability" (1966: 249). Such a deficiency enables one to understand, in passing, the place and the role assumed by the Brahmans on the subcontinent.

While the morphological analogy is distinguished from *African Political Systems*, such as tabulated by Evans-Pritchard and Fortes in a compilation of articles

bearing this title (1940), Dumont is careful to correct it by reproaching them for "reducing the religious functions of a king to his political functions" (1966: 99). Without whiling over the underlying thesis of a "secularisation of kingship", which produces no historical or ethnographical evidence (Fuller & Spencer 1990: 95-97), suffice it to say that this statement casts light on the relations maintained between history and anthropology. In his evaluation (on the basis of an "agnostical mood") of the application of Africanist models to history, or rather, and the nuance is decisive, to Indian histories, the historian Cohn (1987c) maliciously recalls that the "gift" of the Africanists to Indianists is, in reality, a theoretical reversion. The British experience of India in the nineteenth century served, in effect, as a model for the establishment of a colonial infrastructure in Africa!

What is more, the works of the same Evans-Pritchard are subsequently concerned with the institutions of marriage and the concept of paternity, taking up again, as the Indianist Beidelman remarked (1968)—he is known for his study of the so-called traditional system of economic exchange, termed *jajmëni* (1959)—the valuable analyses of Robert Smith regarding the Bedouin lineal relations of Antique Arabia (1885). For, the ideas on the sacred and the profane of the latter, expounded in *The Religion of the Semites* (1889), "were examined and developed", wrote Dumont (1983a: 177), by Hubert and Mauss in *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (1899), once the material on the Indian domain, provided by Sylvain Lévi, of whom Mauss was a student, friend and associate, had been absorbed. It was, in fact, at his request that the great Sanskritist had published, in 1898, his masterly monograph on the Vedic "solemn sacrifice", origin of the Copernican Revolution in Indianism announced in the manifest of Dumont and Pocock, *"For a sociology of India"* (1957b). The latter recommended the establishment of links between ancient Hindu tradition, notably the *Dharma‡ëstra*-s, and contemporary observations in India.

This programme for the foundation of an anthropology at the confluence of Indology and sociology, of texts and "fieldwork", was historically heuristic. However, it gives rise today to many perplexities (Assayag 1994a), and were it only because its application induces the telescoping of the "facts" of modern society and a proliferating collection (more than 7,000) of texts which all specialists recognise as being impossible to date (Kane 1930: vol. I; Lingat 1967: 143-152). This inducement leaves one all the more skeptical as these texts are discordant products of numerous schools, some of which were rivals, but all of which are sacerdotal, or if not, scholastic; optatively combined texts, the normative purpose of which deliberately prevails over factual description. Hence the (Voltarian) comment by Hocart: "The four-caste system is a pure figment, the invention of priests for their own glorification" (1950: 24).

When one today reads Lingat, an authority on Indian law: "patient research by some Indianists to discover (in the texts) the essential elements of caste have

failed" (1967: 50), the Dumontian project amazes. Unless one recollects that the greatest minds of the time in this matter, Dumézil, Benveniste and Lingat himself, were in accord in considering India to represent the best conservatory of the oldest traditions. This common ground, legacy of research undertaken in the nineteenth century on Indo-Europeans, provoked confusion and the unjustified passage from the denomination of caste to its denotation, as underscores Dubuisson (1993: 80-81), who, in the following, denounced the role as model or as implicit reference currently attributed to India by textual specialists (1993: 115-118).

In fact, the historian, as well as the anthropologist, may legitimately question that a single "Hindu law", defining the socio-economic order, that is to say, the place both structural and functional which each occupies therein, would have been effectively recognised from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Unless one passes over in silence the tumultuous destinies of the Indian kingdoms and empires since the time when the first treatises on *dharma* were written; unless one disregards the Mughal multi-secular domination over the subcontinent—is Islam, as it is known, not essentially juridical? Unless, finally, one holds to be insignificant British imposition, the legislative system of which, to consider only that, upset ancient codifications (Derett 1957). This being the case, who, in all rigour, would venture to extend ancient Hindu jurisdiction to the contemporary period?

This is the hypothecary weighing heavily on observers of the contemporary Indian world who innocently turn the pages of the *History of Dharma‡ëstra-*; all the more so since the scholarly compiler of this imposing work took care to provide, to the extent that it was possible, the elements with which to establish the period of the works, as well as the rules which governed the study of the texts (Kane 1930: vol. I). In as much as it is a question of a corpus which not only lacks homogeneity, but which is also archaic and normative, no one is justified in recognising therein the behaviour of a "traditional Hindu" bearing within himself Indian civilisation in its eternity. Unless, of course, one subscribes to an anachronism, that is to say, if one defines tradition on the sole basis of Vedic and Brahmanic documents. Analogically, as Burghart ironically notes, what credit is to be accorded to an anthropologist who would interpret his observations of modern Greece in the light of Aristotle's categories (1990: 268)—all the more so as the Stagirite was a latecomer compared with the compilers of the Vedas! In short, one may be doubtful as to whether sociologists, anthropologists, historians and Indologists can discuss India as if it were a matter of a common "field".

If "one of the raisons d'être of Orientalism is to provide us with the means to combat the superficial and fantastic idea, always in waiting, of a homogeneous Orient uniformly different from Europe", as Malamoud (1993: 88) has suggested, one must impute to a conception of comparative theory, indifferent to the scale of time, the recourse to texts, and not only Indian, of such great age. This remark is just as applicable to the dichotomy "status/contract" of Dumontian comparative theory

inspired by the confrontation of Hindu "order" with Roman law (and with that of Germanic tribes), such as elaborated by the jurisconsult, Maine, in his work *Ancient Law*, published in 1861. That was the year in which he was appointed as a Legal Member of Council in India (1975a: 130ff), but Cohn underscores that Maine saw villages only from afar and without ever staying there (1978c: 205)! In his book, Maine traces the gradual dissolution of this model in the course of history and the simultaneous emergence of the individual as a legal personality, insisting on the inseparability of law and religion in the initial forms of social organisation in which there was collective responsibility, joint property, and in which the patriarchal family defined agnatic kinship ties perpetuated by solemn rites. This genesis later served his comparative theory, in *Village Communities of the East and West* (1875), in which he showed that a large part of Europe existed in the Indian caste system, before concluding with the "absence of the individual in Indian institutions", to borrow this time the title of an article by Dumont (1973).

This manner of opposing "status" and "contract" induces one to read more into it than is denoted. There is the risk of succumbing to the twofold danger, which Dumont does not elude despite his precautions, of recognising therein the passage from "Tradition" to "Modernity" and of falling back on the opposition, this time topographical but implicitly diachronic, between Orient and Occident. It is certainly to the imperative of subordination to the whole, located at the centre of Dumontian comparative theory, that one owes this equivocal shift from (what should be) a strictly typological employment of the opposition, to evolutionistic meanings. The use of the dichotomy is, furthermore, at the source of numerous ambiguities, for which Nisbet discovered the presuppositions and consequences in Burke's discourse on India (as well as those on the American colonies), or in the Hegelian antithesis of the sphere of familial society and the sphere of "civil society" (1984: 97), before tracing, via von Gierke and Fustel de Coulanges, numerous subsequent representations: "*societas/civitas*" of Morgan, "*Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*" of Tönnies, "organic solidarity/mechanical solidarity" of Durkheim (1984: chap. 3 and 5).

2.3. Tarascon, Polynesia, Ceylon and Indo-Europeans

Inspired by Mauss, who was, according to his own admission (1972), a veritable filter for his reading, Dumont recollects that certain archaic forms, especially gift-giving and sacrifice, must be perceived as "total social facts". However, he had experimented with this orientation, even before concerning himself with gift-giving and sacrifice, in the field of French ethnology. Let it suffice to mention here the study conducted in 1946 on the Tarasque, a mythical creature which enthuses the local community and which is carried in procession at the feast of Tarascon. The monster was subdued by a figure of Mediterranean Christianity,

Sainte Marthe. The study, which called for "comparison from all sides", as he wrote (1987: 230), was part of a larger project on Indo-European dragons, influenced by Dumézil. It was published in 1951.

Significantly, the intensive study of forms of action represented by rituals, ubiquitous in the two first monographs on French (1987) and Indian (1957a) ethnography, disappeared in *H.H.* This fact explains the abstract, if not ethereal, nature of the work, raising the question, posed but unresolved, of the reasoned articulation of observation and analysis, of the controlled variation of the scales of description and construction of models, briefly, the relationship between ethnography and sociology. A question which, however, at the same time took up the works of ethno-methodolgists and other American interactionists, towards whom Dumont remained sovereignly indifferent, such did he hold to the relationship established by Talcott Parsons between the parts and the whole; this was, he was wont to say, the only sociological law.

Progressively, the work was entirely absorbed by the analysis of ideological totalities, understood in the (ambiguous) sense of "culture-linguistics". They were explicitly constructed on the basis of works by Dumézil (and, to a lesser extent, on those of Benveniste) concerning the Indo-Europeans, the *Urvolk* towards whom the comparatists and mythologists of the nineteenth century reverted with a sense of return—"old home" as Max Müller wrote (Pinney 1991). It is more precisely through the intervention of a segmentary interpretation of the Dumézilian tripartition (1966: 94)—Africa here casting light on Indo-Europeanness—that Dumont explored the ideological articulation of the old quadripartite content of the *var8a*-s with the caste system (*var8ë‡ramadharma*), the model of which elucidates the proliferating system of *jëti*-s, in this instance empirical castes of contemporary India. For, "if there is a point to be underscored in respect of the *varna*-s", wrote Dumont, "it is the conceptual relationship between Brahman and Kshatriya established at an early date, and still operative today" (1966: 99). An "absolute distinction" (*ibid.*) which encompasses that of "status/power", and is both structure of Indian organisation and ideological foundation in the hierarchic conception of Dumont. As such, it buttresses his later comparative essays.

While Dumont attributed to Bouglé the idea of the fundamental role of priests in the hierarchic structuring of Indian society (1966: 123 n. 41a), it is principally from Hocart—notwithstanding minutely compiled, concise criticism (1958)—that he inferred the central character of the religion of caste. Less for specifically Indianist reasons, than because throughout a career removed from academic institutions begun on the Salomon Islands under the guidance of Rivers and through an interlude in Ceylon, where he was Archaeological Commissioner for eighteen years, this author postulated a historic relationship between "India and the Pacific" (Fiji, Rotum, Wallis, Samoa and Tonga). The argument is documented in an article (1925), which, moreover, was cited by Dumont on the occasion of a comparison with the Australian

system of kinship in *Affinity as a Value* (1983b). It is mainly the presence of a binary system, that is to say, of a dichromatic prescriptive terminology ("Dravidian") combined with the marriage of allogamous cousins —that is, a symmetrical system of prescriptive alliance—which justified Hocart in establishing an (archaic) link between South India and Fiji. But, other similarities of the same type led him to conclude that "ancient India and Fiji had the same religion" (cited by Needham 1978: 46). Thus, as regards social morphology: "every important element concerning castes has its parallel in Fiji" (*id.*) or, regarding the divine character of the chief and the professional specialisation observed when he was headmaster at Lau Island; but also, a simple analogy this time, regarding "the ordeal which consists in walking on the brands of a *sati*" (*ibid.*). The historical hypothesis is so little implausible, according to Dumont (1966: 273), as India would have more belatedly replaced the king by the priest. It confirms, what is more, the well-founded disjunction between "status" and "power" (1966: 100 n. 32h, 269).

To note to what extent the Hocartian understanding of Indian society was informed by his experience of ranking, of chieftaincy and of religious orders when he undertook his study of castes (1930)—written in French and prefaced by Mauss in 1938—explains only in part why Dumont invoked Polynesian facts. For, when he explored food interdiction (*tabu*) (1966: 180) or considered the ritual separation from the purity of the chief, comparing it to that of the Brahmans (1966: 123-124), he borrowed abundantly from the course given (at the Collège de France) by Mauss (1966: 179, n.63f; 1983: 181), who, during a period of five years, commented on the (incomplete) manuscript of Hertz bearing on Polynesia[13]. It should be remembered that Evans-Pritchard wrote a preface to a miscellany of articles by Hertz, along with a tribute to Bouglé for his study of caste (1960: 23).

On the same pages of *H.H.*, where vacillations abound, Dumont criticises the "mechanistic thesis" developed by Stevenson in his article on "status evaluation in the Indian caste system" (1954). This anthropologist had earlier worked among the Chin-Kachins in Burma—his book appeared in Bombay in 1943 (Appadurai 1988: 44) -, a group which the "dynamic" monograph by Leach immortalised. The latter appeared later, in 1854, the same year in which Leach stayed in *Pul Eliya: A Village in Ceylon*, to employ the title of his monograph, which was published in 1961. Burma and Ceylon, two "fieldworks" in the realm of the British Empire which this engineer, converted to ethnology, confronted with a few others in the collection on South Asian castes, including those of Pakistan, which he directed (1960), taking as objective a re-thinking of the domain of anthropology.

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13. This manuscript was published in 1922, under the auspices of Mauss, and entitled *Le Péché et l'expiation dans les sociétés primitives* (revised edition 1988).

With the sole aim of completing this wearying geographical tour, we shall content ourselves to add that Hocart succeeded Evans-Pritchard on the chair in sociology at Cairo University, where he taught until his premature death in 1939.

2.4. France, the 1930s: gnostic regionalism and Cairo once again

Although Dumont would be indebted to Bouglé, and more so to Hocart, for the religious essence of Indian society—dominant *topos* in the history of civilisations, at least since Hegel, a link is still lacking to understand the evolution which led to *H.H.* Even though not of anthropological inspiration, it was nevertheless determinant in the construction of his Indian "object". For, besides hypotheses in the usual sense, or the expected works to which a researcher turns to gain understanding of a phenomenon, works which are anticipations proved in the disciplinary field, there exist more fundamental and persistent preconceptions: what the epistemologist Holten termed *thêmata* (1981). Although these *thêmata* impose orientations which are not of the same kind—they are not rigorously verifiable—, they are not entirely arbitrary and can have a productive value for research.

Such was the role which the texts by the mystic Réné Guénon played for Dumont, as he admitted on several occasions. Decisive youthful reading for the vocation of someone who had not yet chosen a career as ethnologist and who, in the turbulent atmosphere of the 1930s—which were, as Dumont wrote (1975: 171) so very well evoked in an essay by Octavio Paz (1972)—was imbued with the milieux of non-conformist intellectuals ("Grand Jeu", surrealist, but also Catholic, royalist, *nouvelle revue française*, etc.) who fought against the "aberration of the modern world". It was this heretical atmosphere of "sorcerer's apprentice" which Bataille systematised in his first lecture at the Collège de Sociologie, founded with Caillos in 1937 (Hollier 1979).

According to the historian Touchard (1960), most members of these groups, whether institutional or not, were seeking a "Spirit" of the "New Order", titles of two significant journals of that time—a spirit capable of putting an end to the disorder in man's relationship with the world. Herein lies the fundamental problem of the 1930s, as asserts Loubet del Bayle: "the combined drama of a civilisation which constructed itself against man and man who had lost to the very meaning of his destiny", a period which "sanctioned the collapse of the civilisation born of the sixteenth century with the Renaissance, the civilisation of individualism" (1969: 206). Great was the diversity of remedies which each claimed to provide, the activists of *Action Française* (Daudet), Catholics (Maritain), adventurers (like Malraux) or the "well-established" (of the style of Gide), revolutionaries (surrealists), as well as the rebellious (of the style of Michaux), who were in agreement in diagnosing a "crisis of the Occident". And, it is generally from the side of the antithesis of this perverted modernity, termed "Orient" or "Tradition", that

the majority sought illumination with which to provide a response. Nearly everyone recognised in the esotericism of Guénon a thought which spanned the distance between these two notions. A mystagogic tradition, laden with Oriental connotations, celebrated to the point of obsession in a continuous flow of publications since the founding of the journal *Gnosis* (1909). It is today difficult to assess the enormous reception of this visionary. a disciple of mystic chivalry, of whom the above-mentioned authors were fervent admirers[14]. His renown was further enhanced at his conversion to Islam and his subsequent activity as a Sufi in Cairo, where he died in 1951. "I read R. Guénon very early", said Dumont (1984a: 157).

While the sociologist readily refers today to *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vedanta*, published in 1925 (1988: 116), it is from the book *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* (1929) that he derives the distinction between "status" and "power", in particular from chapter IV, appropriately entitled "*Nature respective des Brahmanes et des Ksatriya*".

To bear this out, we shall offer a few lengthy quotes. "The power (of the Ksatriyas) is nothing without an inner, purely spiritual, principle, which embodies the authority of the Brahmans, and in which it finds its only real guarantee (...). In reciprocation of the endorsement which the spiritual authority provides their power, the Ksatriyas must, using the force of which they avail, provide Brahmans with the means to achieve peace...", as Guénon wrote (1929: 62). An understanding of the articulation of two *var8a*-s, he added, requires that one base oneself on the "correct notion of hierarchy", which is to be understood as: that hierarchy in which "the superior 'eminently' contains the inferior, he who has authority within certain limits. defining his own domain" (*id.* 58), which is thus "*a fortiori* that of all within these same limits; whereas, on the other hand, it is not for what lies beyond" (*ibid.*). One recognises in this configuration the superior principle, re-discovered by Dumont, of "the opposition of the pure and impure" (Dumont 1966: 65), the function of which is precisely to order the interlinking of all, as "the respective representatives of the priesthood and of royalty must derive their power from a common source, which is outside of caste", declared his precursor (Guénon 1929: 51). Guénon thus anticipated the Dumontian theory of secularisation of Indian kingship (Dumont 1966: 357)—contested by the majority of Indianists—but formulated as follows: "Kingship is implicitly contained in the priesthood and is without doubt a memory of the distant past in which the two powers were still united, to the state of essential indistinction, in their common supreme principle" (Guénon 1929 :56).

This conjecture served Guénon in establishing the basis of the comparison "Orient" and "Occident". He developed this opposition in view of the problem

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14. Sigaud (1982) has presented an anthology of extracts of eulogistic texts respective of Guénon and a few of these writers, obviously incommensurable.

which gnawed at him: that of the genesis of (modern) individualism. Concerned to trace its origin, he remarked that the atomisation of individuals would have appeared "when the element which represents temporal power comes to dominate that which represents spiritual authority" (1929: 74). The argument is glossed at length in chapter V of *La crise du monde moderne* (1927), but it is presented more concisely in the polemical style of his work on India: "It is precisely this lack of comprehension (of hierarchy) that is implied in the egalitarian theory cherished by the modern world ... since nowhere does equality exist" (1929: 27).

The convergence of his point of view with Dumont's is so little fortuitous that the latter makes allusion thereto. A well-informed structuralist, he nevertheless takes care to upset one of the elements: "But one fine day, much later, I was aware that with my article on renunciation, which was to provide an overall view of the religions of India, I had taken a view almost exactly opposite that contained in the theses of R. Guénon. Had I not, in effect, at the point where he thought to have definitely exorcised individualism, found in the renouncer, that is to say, in the individual outside the world, the great "creator of value" of the Indian world" (1984: 31)? He had progressed to the interpretation of nationalism—violently condemned by the intellectuals of the 1930s, save by the militants of the "Jeune Droite" (Loubet del Bayle 1969: 191); Touchard 1960)—, for which there is no explanation in the work of Guénon: "the formation of nationalism results of the struggle between the temporal and the spiritual", sums up the hermeneut, who at that time was widely received [15].

Nevertheless, one might wager that it was the comparative theory, inscribed at the heart of Guénon's grand work, which must have struck the developing Indianist. The idea notably of an eternal Order, *sanatanadharma*, suitable for defining the hypostasis of the Orient which the exegetes of the "primordial Tradition" constructed in support of a criticism of the modern world, relying on the

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15. The literature on the work of Guénon – by definition bad and always hagiographic in its intentions – is abundant. For a general view, one may refer to *Les Dossiers*, directed by (his disciple) Sigaud (1982) and, for an account of his " Hinduiness " mixed with Sufism, Hebraic cabbala, Christian esotericism, Taoism, alchemy, the antique Mysteries, Celtism and mediaeval Freemasonry ", one may refer to the pages of the thesis, well-informed although zealous, of Biès (1974: 491-552). As regards the Hindu tropism of Daumal, who was strongly influenced by Guénon, one may read the chapter which the same commentator devotes to him (*ibidem*), where it is mentioned that Daumal, author of a Sanskrit grammar and dilettante translator, taught the rudiments of that language to the philosopher S. Weil. " A language which is India's most extraordinary invention ", wrote Daumal, who took himself for a Vedic Rimbaud in his book entitled *Bharata* and who claimed to see by " asphyxia and congestion, (yoga, drowning, narcosis) "; " The *Grand Jeu* group of men who have but one word to say, always the same, unflaggingly, in a thousand different languages; the same Word which was offered by the Vedic Rishis " (!).

superficial dichotomy between *Orient and Occident*, the title of one of his books, published in 1924. In *Addendum* to what was incontestably his "best-seller", Guénon vehemently denounces this "obscuration of the Orient under Occidental influence" (quoted by Biès 1974: 347), in which a few "knights of light", however, succeeded in reading the presage of the intellectual night which will initially envelop the Occident in darkness. And the magus, revealing the reason to his readers, victims of such a dire fate: today, "the lower castes are dominant there" (1929: 46)! But, it is in this that one not dare call upon his philosophy of history, constructed on the bases of a badly digested conception of (Indian) deteriorating world ages (*yuga*), in which fascistic elitism, hooded with mysticism, is fully expressed: "The Vaishyas, in their turn, have usurped the place of the Ksatriyas,—such was the meaning of the 1789 Revolution, the Shudras succeed them—such is the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution" (1929: 91-92)!

Reading such pompous prophecies, one understands that his master Sylvain Lévi, had a foreboding of the heretical drift of the guru. In 1921, he refused to grant him a doctorate in philosophy (from the École Pratique des Hautes Études) for a manuscript entitled *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, which was nevertheless published the same year.

Notwithstanding the masterly anthropological and sociological percolation which Dumont undertook on this pedantic spiritual hotchpotch, one cannot rid oneself of impression that a few traces of this conception of a primordial India, as a support of comparative theory, subsist in his works. Certainly, the name R. Guénon has disappeared from the bibliographies of his "scientific" texts. But, the anthropologist does not miss an occasion to recall the importance of this reading, as well as that of Heinrich Zimmer (Galey 1982: 6) in the genesis of his work: "thanks to Caillois and the visiting of the small group of the "Grand Jeu", R. Daumal and R. Gilbert-Lecomte, under their influence, I read R. Guénon on India, for whom that country was a sort of paradise of "Tradition", a perfectly immobile society in serene possession of the ultimate secrets of Being" (1984b: 31). Despite the distanced and condescending formulation, a number of difficulties, over which Dumont's model of India stumble, no doubt came from this source.

To recall that Guénon's work constitutes the matrix in which the Dumontian conception of India was forged, casts light on the nature of the repeated criticisms which have been addressed to him. These were mainly by Anglo-Saxons and Indian authors who have misunderstood this initial reference, which was particular to the French intelligentsia between the two World Wars, and thus foreign to the academic sphere. Considering the impossibility of instancing these criticisms, the extremely

"deconstructionist" work of R. Inden, *Imagining India*, will alone serve to summarise the radical nature of the controversy (1990: 152-155, 201-204)[16].

Inden there accuses Dumont of having reified the caste system on account of an "essentialised" and "idealised" institution of Hinduism. To found the intelligibility of this society on religion, that is to say, a principle defined in fact by the priestly caste (or by a few of its members who are engaged by others to the purpose of legitimisation) and, what is more, on the sole basis of texts comprising the tradition which one forgets was revisited by colonisation, quite simply takes over the "Orientalist" bias[17]. On the one hand, the structural use of castes and of the ideology of purity only results in the creation of hypotheses; on the other hand, the literal interpretation of written sources disregards that they result of a production through which colonial politics represented the colonised through self-representation[18]. Thus, Dumont doubly exonerated India from any system of historicity. Worse, by insisting on the splitting up of power and the fragility of the dynastic principle, he denied any political dimension to the subcontinent. The argument, directed against "Indianism", the culturist option of which renews in the twentieth century the fascination in exoticism of the preceding century, is explicitly inspired by the academic Third Worldism of the Palestinian American, Edward Said, who assimilated orientalism and imperialism.

Notwithstanding the host of criticism, factual as well as interpretative, unleashed upon Said's scathing attack, *Orientalism*, the question is still deserving of thought by the anthropologist. For. it concerns the manner in which Oriental civilisations constitute an object of study for Europe, that is to say, for those who esteem their profession, a subject of reflection or of reverie. No one who is concerned with the contours and coherence of societies anthropologically qualified as "non-Occidental", can, in effect, evade this reflexive effort by which successive generations of researchers reconfigure the fields of their investigations and open new domains of knowledge by creating at the same time new types of knowledge. Regarding India, this has been done by calling upon agrarian histography so as to not disparagingly confound "*British India or Traditional India?* " (Fuller 1977), or by convoking *subalterns* with the aim of restoring the voices from the "bottom" of the oppressed classes by restoring to the subcontinent its conflicting destiny (Guha

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16. One will find several examples in the bibliographies of Inden (1990) and Dirks (1989).

17 One may read the considered synopsis by Bayly (1988) who, through historical data, sets the record straight, criticising the nominalism operating in the works of so-called " deconstructionists ".

18. Cohn offers clarifying reflections on the effects of the establishment of bureaucratico-administrative technologies of power (1987a; 1987b; *cf.* also Dirks 1988), the pioneer of this type of approach, also current today, which is strongly influenced by the Foucaldian pair " power/knowledge " in English-speaking countries.

1982-89). These are only a few research orientations among many others which endeavour to cast another light on cultural forms and undertake to discuss the methods by which these "other" cultures have been comprehended since (at least) the eighteenth century.

The impact of the lesson is all the more general as it corroborates, in the case of India, that the production of anthropological discourse had too readily placed its referent in a time other than the present (Fabian 1983: 31). Because it increased the distance between the observer and the observed, the process of "exoticisation", ensuing of the colonial encounter (Asad 1973), cast the observed in an eternal past. Not only was the purpose of this asymmetry to justify domination, but it intellectually conditions the comparison between "them" and "us", encouraging a hardening of the opposition between *La civilisation indienne et nous* (1975a), to allude to a work by Dumont, the merit of which is to illustrate the aporiae of the culturist bias. More clearly than in *H.H.*, the age-old continuity underlying hierarchic order is therein renewed as a fundamental structure which merges with the permanence of tradition, both autonomous and consistent, of which the sociological presentation only modifies superficially the original (textual) nature. As such, hierarchy becomes the essence of caste, and the caste system embodies almost naturally the hierarchic principle [19]. For, devolution to a principle so as to provide a key to the exotic character of India by giving form to a territory conceived as a totality is explained, first, by a comparatist concern which, other than its neglect of the different régimes in the history of societies, ultimately only reveals the emergence of the individual/individualism, in India with the features of the renouncer (*H.H., Appendix b*), in Europe with those of the first Christians (1993: 43). Two essentially religious worlds, without either military, entrepreneur, politician or merchant.

3. REGIONALISM OR TRANSNATIONALISM?

Notwithstanding the experience of a closely circumscribed "fieldwork", which ethnologists assimilate too readily with the only laboratory in which theory is tested, the construction of the anthropological "object" has similarities with a mental crossroads, space of encounter and innovation, a humus favourable to numerous hybridizations; not to mention the objective hazards owing to which notions and ideas are exchanged and transformed into numerous communicating vessels.

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19. Regarding this ambiguity in Dumont's notion of hierarchy, one may refer to a perceptive article by Caillé (1992).

Attesting to this in masterly fashion is the work of Dumont who, by means of selection, made conceptual transfers and systematic importations, grafting according to need the African, Polynesian, Latin, or German worlds onto the Indian subcontinent, the only one explored firsthand.

Such a genealogy of ideas, as was seen, reverts to the confines of an intellectual world, beyond which the endeavour of the work claims to have gone. At the same time, it discloses *in statu nascendi* both thematic and ambition, the intuitive foundation which leads thought towards what is to come. Notwithstanding the ambiguous nature of the presuppositions and despite their relative abandonment, they nevertheless continue to invigorate the works by lending them both dynamism and orientation. Analogically to what Canguilhem said respective of philosophy, anthropology also nourishes itself on that which it is not. To evaluate it, one must not have a preconceived interpretative perspective defined only by references sanctioned by the history of the discipline, nor reduce the epistemology of the so-called human sciences to the strict separation between science and ideology, or to a few (tautological) criteria of demarcation. To relegate to pre-history the *thêmata* which activate thought deprives it of its impulse, which is in reality its *élan vital*; not to consider the *thêmata*, precludes an understanding of the trajectory and culmination of pre-history.

That which the epistemologist of the "hard" sciences designates by *thêmata* is similar to the "spoken word", which the philosopher Merleau-Ponty situated prior to the "speaking word" in the social sciences and the arts: the issuance of an unarticulated intention to signify whence creation came. The "spoken word" shapes the approach and gives purposeful orientation, irrespective of eventual rectifications and later theoretical or aesthetic development. The "spoken word" can still be heard, much later, when it is a question of inquiring into phenomena, describing reality, conceptualising ideas, but also of generalising and comparing, in short, of ensuring the retrospective coherence of successive contingent modifications which give meaning to a work knowingly constructed in a given period time. Finally, a work organised in such a way that it will be read in its turn, and not only by future practicians in the "field" concerned, who appropriate it by echoing the aphorism of Oscar Wilde, according to whom the painter is not inspired by nature, but by painting.

There remain questions raised by the recurrence in Dumont's work of a few *thêmata* (status/contract, holism/individualism, hierarchy/egalitarianism, tradition/modernity). Although relying upon the attempt to understand informed by comparative theory, the repetition of these systematic, ahistorical, axiological pairs has a tendency to reduce complex societies to ideological blueprints, a tendency which is all the greater as it proceeds from a reference lodged in an idealised Brahmanhood recalling the essentially textual heritage of his sociology. Such mimetism vis-à-vis the Brahmanic conception of the relationship of texts to

experience and reality awakens epistemological suspicions respective of the sociological undertaking as a whole. Result? Culturism confines India to hierarchy alone and reduces comparison to a simple dichotomy. Proof, in a prosopographic and academic case, of the largely constructed character of the regionalist approach, literally fictive as it confirms the idea of watertight boundaries between cultures, or substantiates the notion of the confinement of local consciousnesses which are circumscribed therein. As if each, but obviously more the Other, had been incarcerated in a manner of thinking the world; as if each, bound to a quotidian culture, socially reproduced himself in a mechanical and autistic manner.

One must, rather, admit, as regards both the birth date of anthropology as an academic discipline, as well as the historical depth of the "objects" of study, that anthropologists have only examined detailed regional interactions, or even only the local effects which have produced recent transnational crossings. Maine published *Ancient Laws* three years after the "Great Rebellion"; Evans-Pritchard did his "fieldwork" a few months after the German Federal Republic had completed a punitive mission against the Nuers; Fortes undertook his in Ghana a generation after the destruction by the English of the state to which the Tallensis belonged (Cohn 1987: 205). Has not every regional study been, no doubt since a very long time, determined by multiple causes? It is the vocation for the anthropologist to take note thereof. Exploring, for example, the history of the transformation of the discipline, without taking refuge in the nostalgia of isolates, under pain of seeing the disappearance of the tribe unified by a myth to which ethnologists adhere. Is not one of the forgotten virtues of diffusionism to recollect that this fact has today become evident as a result of the world transmission of information in real time (Appadurai 1990)?

In consideration of this, is one to be astonished by the observation which I made in India during a recent investigation, disrupted by the bloody events subsequent to the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya (1992)? An instance of revenge which Hindu religious nationalists grant themselves, humiliated, as they vociferate, by the Moghul emperor Bëbur, who had razed their temple... in 1531! Each and everyone could view, on the streets and on television screens, the processions of these militant Hindus —called locally "saffron yuppies": sneakers with platform soles on their feet, visored caps on their heads, they danced "rap" to celebrate the victory of their ancient god Rëma.

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ABSTRACTS

Denis VIDAL, Max Müller and the Theosophists

In this paper, I argue that the dominant forms of orientalism prevalent in India from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards are not adequately explained by the criticismes of Edward Said or Ronald Inden. It must not be forgiven that from the time of Macaulay onwards, orientalism, far from epitomising colonial ideology, was in fact marginalised by the British administration. Moreover, orientalism, in its less orthodox forms, did in fact play an important role in the formation of anti-imperialist discourse in India. This means that in order to evaluate the full significance of what orientalism represented in late colonial India, one needs first to consider the relationship between is different composite elements.

Roland LARDINOIS, Genesis of Louis Dumont's Anthropology

The anthropologist Louis Dumont's studies of India have been widely debated among Indianists, and in particular his *Homo hierarchicus*, published nearly 30 years ago. Breaking with a number of cursory analyses which often adopt a logic of blame rather than one of understanding, the author proposes to restore the unity of the principles of intelligibility in Louis Dumont's anthropology by not seperating the indianist portion of his work from his studies on individualism, or internal analysis from the external determinations arising from the field of indianist production. The author thus shows that Louis Dumont holds up, as the learned mode of the Indian world, the indigenous scholar (i.e. the Brahmin), translated back into the language of a sociology of values, even as he proclaims his filiation with durkheim, who makes a distinction, precisely, between indigenous and sociological understanding. To understand this shift from the logical meaning of Hinduism to its evaluative interpretation, one must take seriously L. Dumont's avowed two fold indebtedness: to Marcel Mauss, on the one hand, and to the esotericist-essayist, René Guénon, on the other. In this light, Louis Dumont's anthropology appears as the product of the meeting of two contradictory intellectual and epistemological spaces which constituted the field of Indianist production in France in the 1930s: on one side, the space of the esotericist school, which produced an essentialist, organicist wiew of society and, on the other, the space of durkheimian sociology and classical Indian studies which developed a positivist rationalist body of knowledge that enabled scholars to discover the historical and social determinants of Hindu categories of thinking.

Jackie ASSAYAG, The Indianism and the Comparative Theory of Louis Dumont

The construction of the anthropological " object " bears similarity to a mental crossroads which brings into play a formidable mixing of ideas. Attesting to this is the work of Louis Dumont, who by means of selection made conceptual transfers and systematic importations, grafting according to need the African, Polynesian, Latin, or German worlds onto the Indian subcontinent, the only one explored firsthand. An exploration of his work reveals also " presuppositions ", or " thematic hypotheses " (*thêmata*)—ensuing of the intellectual crisis of the 1930s which the author admits having traversed—lodged in the pantheon of masters of sociology and anthropology. These *thêmata* explain both the permanence of certain fundamental intuitions and a number of difficulties encountered by Dumont's conception of India and his comparative method. Finally, they give evidence of the largely constructed character of the regionalist approach and the actual transregional nature of so-called " fieldworks " of study which have been considered for too long a time as isolates.

RÉSUMÉS

Denis VIDAL, Max Müller et les theosophistes

Les formes dominantes prises par l'orientalisme dans le contexte indien ne se laissent pas aisément réduire à la perspective critique illustrée par les travaux de Edward Said ou de Ronald Inden. On peut d'abord rappeler que l'orientalisme savant - loin d'avoir toujours incarné l'idéologie officielle coloniale, a été, au contraire, délibérément marginalisé au sein de cette dernière à partir de la première moitié du XIXe siècle. Et il ne faut pas oublier non plus que, sous des formes assez peu orthodoxes, il est vrai, l'orientalisme a joué également un rôle effectif dans la critique de l'impérialisme, moins d'ailleurs en Europe qu'en Inde même et auprès des indiens. Ainsi, pour mieux apprécier ce que l'orientalisme a pu représenter en Inde à l'époque victorienne, est-il fructueux de rapprocher d'abord entre elles les formes très diverses sous lesquelles celui-ci a pu se manifester. Cela suppose aussi que l'on n'entérine pas trop rapidement la tendance systématique de ses tenants les plus variés à se dénigrer mutuellement.

Roland LARDINOIS, genèse de l'anthropologie de Louis Dumont

Les études anthropologiques de Louis Dumont sur le monde indien ont fait l'objet d'amples débats parmi les indianistes, en particuliers l'ouvrage *Homo Hierarchicus* publié il y a près de trente ans. Rompant avec nombre d'analyses schématiques qui procèdent plus souvent d'une logique de la condamnation que de la

compréhension, on se propose de restituer l'unité des principes d'intelligibilité de l'anthropologie dumontienne en ne séparant pas la partie indianiste de l'œuvre et les travaux sur l'individualisme, l'analyse interne et les déterminations externes issues du champ de production indianiste. On montre ainsi que Louis Dumont propose, comme modèle savant du monde indien, le modèle lettré indigène (c'est-à-dire de type brahmanique) retraduit dans le langage d'une sociologie des valeurs, alors même qu'il se réclame de Durkheim qui opère précisément la distinction entre compréhension indigène et compréhension sociologique. Pour comprendre ce glissement du sens logique de l'hindouisme à son interprétation évaluative, il faut prendre au sérieux la double influence dont se réclame Louis dumont, celle de Marcel Mauss d'une part, et celle de l'essayiste ésotériste René Guénon d'autre part. L'anthropologie de Louis Dumont apparaît alors comme le résultat de la rencontre de deux espaces intellectuels et épistémologiques contradictoires qui constituent le champ de production indianiste en France dans les années 30 ; d'un côté, l'espace du courant de pensée ésotériste qui produit une vision essentialiste et organiciste du monde social et, de l'autre, l'espace de la sociologie durkheimienne et de l'indologie classique qui développe un savoir de type positif et rationaliste permettant de mettre à jour les déterminations historiques et sociales des catégories de pensée du monde hindou.

Jackie ASSAYAG, L'Indianisme et la théorie comparative de Louis Dumont

La construction de l'" objet " anthropologique s'apparente à un carrefour mental qui met en jeu un formidable brassage d'idées. L'atteste l'œuvre de Louis Dumont, qui, au moyen de tris, pratiqua les transferts conceptuels et les importations systématiques, greffant au besoin les mondes africain, polynésien, latin, germain, au sous-continent indien, le seul exploré de première main. L'exploration de l'oeuvre dévoile également des " présuppositions ", ou " hypothèses thématiques " (*thêmata*) – issues de la crise intellectuelle des années trente que l'auteur confesse avoir traversé –, logés dans son panthéon des maîtres de la sociologie et de l'anthropologie. Ces *thêmata* expliquent à la fois la permanence de certaines intuitions fondamentales et nombre de difficultés qu'ont rencontré et sa conception de l'Inde et sa méthode comparative. Ils témoignent finalement du caractère largement construit de l'approche régionaliste et de la nature en réalité transrégionale des dits " terrains " d'enquêtes, trop longtemps conçus comme des isolats.

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The purpose of the three texts included in this volume is to cast light on the extent to which Orientalism is founded on anthropology, and conversely—each author doing so in his own manner. Max Muller and Louis Dumont were, of course, only the standard-bearers of a disciplinary tendency to capture an essential, not to say, fundamental, India.

The relevance of the studies in this volume is fourfold. First, it is shown that the works of French-speaking researchers in India have not been devoted exclusively to research done "in the field". Second, it enables one to recall that there is indeed a critical tradition of the dominating Dumontian model in France. Third, it calls to mind a few unnoticed, forgotten or overshadowed intellectual references which, nevertheless, were determinant in the French construction of India. Finally, these texts affirm how heuristic it is to cross the boundaries between disciplines or faculties, literary genres or inspired tropisms, rather than preserve them on the basis of a single paradigm.

It is hoped that the perspective offered by these three texts will help to elucidate the limits between Indology and the social sciences, and will serve to illustrate the strength of what the French philosopher, Cornélius Castoriadis, has called " the imaginary institution of society ".

This volume is reprinted as it has been edited in 1997.

Ce petit volume veut contribuer à reconsidérer l'orientalisme au moyen d'une anthropologie résolument plurielle. Dans les trois textes qu'il comporte, le propos est de mettre en évidence les limites de la fondation de l'orientalisme sur l'anthropologie, ainsi que sa réciproque; Max Müller et Louis Dumont n'étant que les enseignes d'une tendance disciplinaire s'épanouissant dans la longue durée : celle que manifeste la volonté (illusoire) de capturer une Inde essentielle, pour ne pas dire fondamentale.

L'intérêt du regroupement de textes est triple. Montrer d'abord que les travaux de chercheurs de langue française, en Inde, ne sont pas exclusivement dévolus aux recherches conduites sur le "terrain". Rappeler ensuite qu'il y a bien une tradition critique du modèle dumontien en France, où l'œuvre a effectivement été le paradigme dominant, sinon exclusif. Attirer l'attention aussi sur quelques références intellectuelles inaperçues mais qui furent pourtant déterminantes dans la construction française de l'"objet" Inde. Confirmer enfin, combien il est heuristique de ne pas s'en tenir aux frontières entre disciplines ou facultés, genres littéraires ou tropismes d'inspiration, à l'évidence du paradigme unique.

Souhaitons que la mise en perspective de ces trois textes aidera à éclairer les limites entre indologie et sciences sociales. Gageons aussi qu'ils contribueront à illustrer la puissance de ce que le philosophe français Cornélius Castoriadis (1975) a appelé "l'institution imaginaire de la société".

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