

Culture

Nous sommes tous Égo The King and You

Bernard Arcand



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La conférence Harry Hawthorn 1995 / The 1995 Harry Hawthorn Lecture

Nous sommes tous Égo / *The King and You*

Bernard Arcand *

Note de la rédaction: selon la tradition, nous publions le texte intégral de la Conférence Hawthorn, sans référence ni notes de bas de page.

Editorial note: as is customary, we publish the integral version of the Hawthorn Lecture, without any bibliographic references or notes.

Avertissement de l'auteur : le texte qui suit est une transcription *verbatim* de la Conférence Harry Hawthorn prononcée lors du banquet annuel de la CASCA, le 28 mai 1995, à l'Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec. Il serait préférable d'en faire la lecture d'un trait et à la suite d'un repas plus que convenable et raisonnablement arrosé.

Author's warning: This is a verbatim transcript of the Harry Hawthorn Lecture as delivered at the end of the annual dinner of the CASCA, on May 28, 1995, at the Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec. The reader would be well advised to read the following text after a decent meal accompanied by a few glasses of wine.

PROLOGUE

Chers collègues, permettez-moi, d'abord, un court prologue dans les deux langues officielles de cet étrange pays: cette conférence sera prononcée en français et en anglais, mais sans traduction parce que l'invitation à présenter la conférence Harry Hawthorn m'est venue de l'université de Colombie-Britannique (que je remercie déjà) mais aussi parce que je suis, et nous sommes aujourd'hui, à Montréal.

Dear colleagues, first allow me a short preface in the two official languages of this most curious land only to say that this Conference will be delivered in both English and French, but without translation. Because the invitation for the Hawthorn Conference came to me from the University of British Columbia (to which I am most grateful), but also because I am, we are, today, in Montréal.

Le texte de ma conférence fait très exactement vingt pages manuscrites et je changerai donc de langue à chaque 6,666 pages, respectant ainsi la composition linguistique du pays autant que celle de la CASCA. Il y aura donc en tout trois parties, qui sont nullement indépendantes ; c'est dire, du coup, que je m'assure d'être assez mal compris par le plus grand nombre. Et j'avertis tout de suite que je répondrai à toute question dans une langue en disant que j'y ai, bien sûr, déjà fourni réponse dans l'autre.

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The Conference makes for exactly twenty pages of text and I intend to switch language every 6.666 pages, which roughly corresponds to the linguistic divisions within the country as well as within CASCA. Thus, there are three interdependent parts to my single argument and by so using both languages, I am confident of being greatly misunderstood by the largest possible part of the audience. And I must also warn you that I shall, of course, answer any question in one language with the claim that it has already been addressed in the other.

Malheureusement, je crains fort que ce soit là la dernière blague de cette conférence, car ce n'est que la semaine dernière que j'ai appris que la très sérieuse Hawthorn Lecture serait désormais offerte à la fin d'un banquet et, de préférence, par un amuseur publique. Fin du prologue.

Unfortunately, this will probably be the last joke of this talk. For it is only last week that I learned that, in the future, the very formal Hawthorn Lecture would be offered at the end of the banquet and, preferably, by a stand-up comic. End of the prologue.

PART 1

Being asked to give the Harry Hawthorn Lecture is surely an honor, but one should never forget that it is also the sort of pleasant recognition which usually comes with age. And so, besides being pleased, I can take for certain that I am now old enough. However, convinced that I am not yet that old, I could not for the life of me stand here and reflect on my long and not so illustrious career. Indeed I have worked, amongst other areas, on Cuiva ethnography and on the modern phenomenon of pornography, and I shall refer to those in a moment, but it will be with the intention of giving you some sense of what I am working on now; and please allow me the warning that much of this remains tentative, exploratory and very unfinished business.

But first, let me be polite and, as custom requires, make some reference to the work of Harry Hawthorn. Much could he said here (especially by those who knew him better than myself), but I shall focus my brief reference on perhaps the most obvious. Harry Hawthorn will forever be remembered at least as the co-author of an important report which made recommendations to a government which had every intention of doing

exactly the opposite. The report expressed particular views and ideas within a social and political context which was actively promoting the contrary policies. And the profession may remember the contradiction between the report's generous statement of principles and the sinister intentions of the Liberal government. This type of inversion is not without charm and this is very much the sort of consideration I wish to submit to you today.

Now, back to my own work. For the last 25 years, I have pursued and tried to construct the broadest possible monograph of one cultural community, the Cuiva of Eastern Colombia. In the pantheon of anthropological stereotypes, the Cuiva would rate as a classic example of a society of hunters-and-gatherers: very small scale, nomadic, affluent, relaxed and also forced into an often brutal contact with the modern world. With my other hand, I completed a study of a most modern phenomenon, pornography, a rather peculiar aspect of urban culture which could equally rate as a stereotype in the field of post-modernity studies. In other words, I have found myself stretched between a very old-fashioned monograph of one single coherent society and, on the other hand, trying to make some sense of one particular detail from a vast, immensely complex and often fragmented cultural complex.

Obviously, I have chosen two radically different study areas, but sooner or later (may it be only in order to try to avoid schizophrenia), I must make the effort to link, relate and even compare the two.

How can those two societies be compared? How can my two studies be compared? Or, if you prefer a more banal formulation: "Why is there no pornography in Cuiva society?" Of course, one way of answering would be to say that I had noted, as anyone would, that the mass-consumption of pornography makes little sense without understanding how the practice of masturbation became more acceptable and appropriate with the development of a broader sense of private intimacy and a much increased concentration on self. In short, from the very first glance, the crucial role of modern individualism seemed to offer an immediate and striking contrast to Cuiva society. This was certainly nothing new, merely another entrance into one of the oldest enduring debates in anthropology: how legitimate can it be to claim, regardless of the level of summary generalization, that modernity is marked by individualism and that

Cuiva society shows nothing remotely similar? Or is it me who looks at the two situations with different eyes and who sees Cuiva society as an anthropologist should, while understanding perfectly well that pornography must be looked at with private eyes?

We could (and will) argue the case on the basis of some empirical evidence but, first, let's briefly remind ourselves that historians of our discipline have repeatedly claimed that we have always had to cope with a great divide between two analytical traditions, on the basis of a simple choice of the emphasis placed on roles or on actors. Under the totemic figures of Durkheim and perhaps Kroeber, we have studied societies as sets of rules and recognizable patterns of collective behaviors. Following the totemic figure of Malinowski, we have at times been more concerned with actors, with the real human beings negotiating their adjustment to society, to others, and to life in general. These two broad perspectives are typically presented as conflicting and the conflict has certainly been with us since the beginning of anthropology. And it does represent somewhat of a permanent dilemma. Even the archeologist must, at times worry as to whether the drawings on the cave walls are not in fact the protest graffiti of an outcast artist ridiculed and banned from society. It should worry also the historian of the discipline who must wonder if this question of the role of Ego is not, in fact, the root of the very long and much celebrated debate between the rival kinship theories of "Descent" and "Alliance." It is somewhat of a paradox, again, for the commentator who may wish to construct the argument that this same concern with the complex relations of the individual to society is really what regenerated the recent interest in returning to various forms of psychoanalytical approaches, or, indeed, what stimulated much of the reflexive anthropology which today calls itself post-modern.

This is obviously serious business, simply because it involves a reassessment of our most basic definition of what society is. Which would explain why the question may fade and remain hidden on the proverbial back-burner for periods of time, but never fails to reappear and periodically return to the surface. As if anthropology was forever caught in the movement of a pendulum which, at one extreme, best represented perhaps by Frederik Barth, claims that the notion of society is never more than a pattern that can only be

observed a posteriori and is thus largely a fraud imposed on reality by the social sciences. While at the other end of the same movement, we find Louis Dumont claiming that modern anthropologists can no longer understand other societies, because of the considerable weight of their own ethnocentric concept of the individual which has now rendered them quite incapable of perceiving the "social." Between these mutual and radical accusations, we find a great number of the familiar debates and puzzles which anthropology always had to face.

First of all, we know the question is genuine. Because we take for granted that culture and society do exist and must have meaning beyond the sum total of the members. At the same time, we also assume that human beings always remain capable of some measure of autonomy and usually maintain at least some form of private refuge, or secret hide-out, from society; some of us may lead double or triple lives, but each one likes to protect some form of intimate internal life quite separate from the group [Come to think of it, I presently have no idea what you're thinking while listening to this! Ah, yes! You're thinking "Has he reached page 6 yet?" He will after the following paragraph!]. So, we are familiar with the source of our hesitation: how relevant to our understanding of society is that intimate private domain which, to paraphrase Meyer Fortes, is at the same time excluded and included in society?

The question has always been central to our understanding of any community. Surely, many would say, there must be such a thing as "society," at least in the sense of its members having learned and sharing words, names, concepts, ideas, representations, values, morals, all of which must be in some minimal order in order to allow for communication and thus reveal a common sense of orderly priorities and a shared hierarchy of some sort. So that, in the end, most private individuals will nevertheless become Inuk or Norwegian. But it is not that simple, Frederik Barth would argue, and it never works quite like that in real life: each and every society is fragmented and, just as there are many ways of being a Moslem or even more ways of looking at a master-piece, there are only disorderly ways of being Inuk or Norwegian. But in reaction to this view, Louis Dumont or Daniel De Coppet would protest and answer that this way of looking at society constitutes a recipe for an absolute and even absurd relativism, and the cre-

ation of a "cognitive apartheid." Since nothing, therefore, can ever have meaning out of its appropriate and strategic context, this, in the end, would mean that the science of anthropology ceases to exist. [And we have now reached page 6.666.]

II^e PARTIE

C'est là, en somme, la plus ancienne des exigences de l'anthropologie : trouver comment rendre compte de l'étranger sans en détruire l'originalité ? Est-il préférable, comme disait Durkheim, de dresser le tableau des inventions et des contraintes sociales et culturelles ? Ou faut-il plutôt suivre la voie tracée par Malinowski et chercher avant tout à comprendre le sujet agissant, l'être humain qui s'exprime et qui se façonne lui-même par ses gestes et dans ses actes concrets ?

Pour Durkheim, à la limite, l'existence même de l'individu constitue en quelque sorte un échec de l'appareil d'intégration sociale, car si cette intégration était mieux réussie, l'individu disparaîtrait ; et s'il ne disparaît pas suffisamment, il ne faut pas se surprendre de son suicide. Mais au contraire, aux yeux de Frederik Barth, il est tout aussi évident que l'anthropologie fait couramment référence à une « société » qui n'est que fictive, un fantasme qui convient parfaitement à l'analyste, mais qui n'a jamais eu d'existence réelle : il n'y a de vrai que les êtres humains qui agissent et il n'y a d'histoire qu'à travers les actes et dans l'événement. Par contre, et en contrepartie, nous connaissons tous la mauvaise nouvelle voulant que la vie ne soit qu'empruntée par les pauvres individus que nous sommes et que cette vie ait la fâcheuse tendance à se poursuivre après notre mort. En contrepoint, encore, si les perspectives à la mode nous parlent beaucoup de bricolage post-moderniste, encore faudrait-il identifier (comme le demandait Marylin Strathern) d'où proviennent ces divers éléments du bricolage, à partir de quel tout peut-on extraire tant de parties ? Mais à l'inverse (pour continuer ce jeu de contrepoints), on peut demander si le système, dont on dit qu'une société particulière n'est que le produit visible, si ce système n'est pas essentiellement un construit de l'esprit analytique qui résisterait mal à l'obligation de prédire l'événement ? Et ainsi de suite, les questions s'enchaînent. Dit autrement encore, si l'on refuse d'admettre l'importance de l'acte, en particulier l'acte de parole (dont parlent admirablement, entre autres, Robert Paine ou Maurice Bloch), alors dites-moi ce que je fais ici en ce moment!

Bref, on pourrait poursuivre longtemps encore cette liste de questions et cela donnerait assez rapidement l'impression d'un interminable jeu de pirouettes. Néanmoins, on peut aussi parier que tout anthropologue dans l'exercice de son métier a dû affronter ces quelques questions élémentaires, sous une forme ou sous une autre. Il y a là toute la matière au vaste débat qui anime l'anthropologie depuis sa naissance et dont on pourrait reconstruire la genèse pour en retracer ensuite l'évolution, et qui n'offre apparemment aucun indice d'apaisement. Et il n'est même pas certain, malgré ses formes toujours mouvantes, que le débat progresse beaucoup : par exemple, selon la lecture qu'en fait Marylin Strathern, le très moderne James Clifford reprend là-dessus exactement la même position théorique et les mêmes propos que Lewis Henry Morgan.

Avec un peu de recul, on pourrait croire que chaque fois qu'un débat de ce genre perdure et que ses fidèles auditoires en dégagent l'impression d'être enfermés dans un cercle vicieux, rien n'est plus facile que de suggérer que la question originale avait donc dû, au départ, être mal formulée. Rien n'est plus facile, il suffirait de lire quelques philosophes, en particulier peut-être Norbert Elias, et c'est donc ce que je me propose de faire, ... mais plus tard, pas aujourd'hui. Pour l'instant, je redirai seulement que ces querelles analytiques demeurent vivaces et tout à fait pertinentes, mais qu'il n'y a jamais de véritable opposition entre individu et société. Il est grossièrement évident que l'individu est au moins précédé par un contexte social prédéfini, tout comme l'oeuf provient toujours d'une poule et que Dieu seul sait comment la première poule est apparue.

Par ailleurs (et le sujet mérite une parenthèse), il faut ajouter en passant que les débats autour de cette vaste question des rapports de l'individu à la société ne semblent pas toujours bien engagés. Parce que parmi les principaux concepts qui devraient me permettre de joindre mes intérêts pour la société Cuiva et la pornographie moderne, plusieurs n'ont pas la clarté requise par tout bon outil analytique. On pourrait citer en exemple cette notion même d'individualisme, si chère aux étudiants de la modernité, qui se traduit dans les faits, comme Max Weber l'avait déjà souligné, dans un très large ramassis d'idées vagues et disparates, parmi lesquelles on retrouve couramment des éléments aussi hétérogènes que l'autonomie, la personnalité, la conscience de soi, l'identité person-

nelle, la notion de personne, la citoyenneté, l'individualité, l'individuation, l'égoïsme, le narcissisme, et probablement bien d'autres suppléments. Pis encore, chacune de ces notions se trouve porteuse de sens qui, faut-il le rappeler, varient sensiblement selon les traditions philosophiques de chacun. C'est dire à quel point quiconque voudrait débattre de ces questions serait bien imprudent de procéder comme si nécessairement tous savaient, au juste, de quoi l'on parle. Cependant, les débats doivent être maintenus et le sujet mérite d'être poursuivi. Et ce ne serait quand même pas la première fois qu'un flou conceptuel masque des questions fort pertinentes. Il suffira d'essayer d'éviter les platitudes et de prendre le temps de revoir ce que nous tenons pour assuré.

Où trouverons-nous le terrain plus solide? Premièrement, nous croyons connaître l'histoire de notre Occident. Du moins, l'avons nous souvent entendue racontée. Sans devoir nécessairement étudier et reprendre tous les détails des analyses de Habermas ou d'Adorno, nous avons appris que rien peut-être n'illustre mieux qui nous sommes comme société et comme modernes que l'émergence progressive, surtout aux 17^{ème} et 18^{ème} siècles, de l'individu comme sujet séparé, distinct et autonome. Et notre histoire, telle que décrite par Michel Foucault, Karl Popper, Marcel Gauchet, Alexis de Tocqueville, Alexis Nouss ou Alain Laurent, et combien d'autres, c'est l'histoire d'une lente et longue marche vers un individualisme de plus en plus ferme et affirmé. Nous sommes les produits authentiques de l'âge des droits de la personne. On pourrait le montrer en retraçant l'histoire, depuis au moins trois siècles, de la musique, de l'architecture, du portrait, des relations conjugales, de la lecture et de l'imprimé, du sport ou du divertissement en général. Tout semble converger et la conclusion générale désormais paraît incontestable. Vous avez déjà lu tout cela et plusieurs me diraient, sans doute, qu'il serait inutile d'insister davantage.

Peu m'importe que cette vision globale soit adéquate ou contestable, l'idéologie moderne, elle, demeure tout à fait écrasante. La concentration sur soi, le souci de soi, la pleine réalisation de soi, le respect de soi, tous ces thèmes surexploités sont tous les jours affichés comme des caractéristiques dominantes de la modernité occidentale. Et l'on ajouterait tout aussi facilement la liste de leurs corollaires : le doute de tout et l'incertitude généralisée, Heisenberg, René Thom, Feyerabend, et, bien sûr Orson Welles et Andy Warhol. On dit

même qu'il ne s'agit plus là d'une idéologie, mais d'une véritable manière de vivre. Il n'y aurait donc plus que des individualités particulières, entières et autonomes. Henri Lefebvre en arrive même à se demander si cette société occidentale mérite encore d'être considérée comme une société. Pour certains, il ne reste plus qu'à reconnaître le Seigneur Jésus comme son sauveur personnel, tandis que d'autres préfèrent lire le plus récent essai de Pascal Bruckner sur l'immense fatigue de soi, c'est-à-dire (je cite) « ... non pas tant le règne des bien-pensants que celui des bien-souffrants, le culte du désespoir convenu, la religion du larmoiement obligatoire, le conformisme de la détresse... » (fin de la citation). Évidemment, la lourdeur idéologique paraît considérable.

Autre caractéristique difficilement contestable, l'idéologie occidentale prétend sans hésiter que cet individualisme lui est particulier. Dans la perspective occidentale courante, ce sont les « autres » qui vivent dans des sociétés « holistes », là où l'individu est soumis et dominé par la cohérence du tout organique. Prenez pour exemple cette citation de Alain Laurent, extraite de *L'histoire de l'individualisme*, publiée dans la populaire collection « Que sais-je » : « Jusqu'au IV^{ème} siècle avant J.-C., l'organisation de l'ensemble des groupes humains ... ne renvoie qu'à un seul modèle, celui du holisme. Partout règnent exclusivement la communauté tribale ... Le comportement des hommes y est totalement déterminé par l'appartenance au groupe et la soumission intériorisée à ses lois... Ils ne disposent d'aucune autonomie ... et ne se pensent ni se représentent comme individus singuliers mais agissent en simples fragments dépendants d'un "Nous" ». On pourrait difficilement être plus clair et les exemples du même genre abondent.

Nous vivrions donc au coeur d'un agglomérat d'individus hétéroclites, tandis que les autres vivraient en société, unis et uniformes. Et même l'anthropologie n'est pas à l'abri de ce discours du contraste radical entre Nous et Eux : tous connaissent les Nuer, mais combien se souviennent de leur noms ou prénoms personnels? On a récemment entendu certains annoncer que l'anthropologie désormais ne pourrait plus négliger l'individu, maintenant qu'elle n'étudiait plus uniquement les sociétés restreintes. D'autres, plus méchants, ajoutent que les anthropologues ont toujours refusé de voir et d'apprécier, ailleurs, la juste valeur des individus par crainte de ne rendre

leur objet d'étude dangereusement semblable à eux-mêmes.

C'est peut-être l'œuvre de Louis Dumont qui a le plus contribué à cette thèse du contraste entre l'individualisme moderne et le holisme des sociétés traditionnelles. Pour Dumont, la domination très manifeste de l'individualisme comme valeur sociale dans la société moderne en fait un cas unique et tout à fait exceptionnel. L'individu s'y trouve érigé en notion morale, du jamais vu dans l'histoire comme dans l'ethnographie comparative, un individu auquel l'on accorde des droits fondamentaux et supérieurs aux droits de la société ou de la nature. Bref, une société hors du commun, parce que démocrate et qui ne cesse d'insister sur la liberté et l'égalité. Parce qu'ici la notion de « pouvoir » a remplacé celles « d'ordre » et de « hiérarchie » : la modernité représente une invention et une rupture, désormais le monde ne sera radicalement plus le même. Dumont en trouve preuve dans le développement du relativisme culturel et dans l'invention de l'anthropologie. Alors que d'autres sociétés tiennent pour acquis qu'aux limites de la communauté commence l'animalité, nous avons récemment adopté la croyance en l'unité du genre humain.

L'an dernier, lors d'une conférence au congrès de l'ACFAS, j'avais exploré quelques raisons qui font que l'oeuvre de Dumont a parfois un air de splendide échec. Je ne veux pas reprendre ici ce même propos, et je ne le résume que très brièvement.

D'abord, il y a le fait que la comparaison entre l'Inde et la France se transforme, chez Dumont, comme chez plusieurs de ses disciples ou détracteurs, en un gigantesque partage du monde et en une vaste opposition entre les modernes et le reste de l'humanité, entre « Nous tous » et « tous les Autres », et que ce contraste tourne parfois à l'évolutionnisme grossier : il y aurait donc « Nous », l'individualisme moderne, et puis tous ceux qui, dans le fond, nous précèdent. Ensuite, il y a apparence d'échec chez Dumont qui espérait réussir pleinement son anthropologie et arriver à pouvoir regarder la France avec les yeux de l'Inde, mais qui, rendu au bord du précipice, hésite, prend peur, et fait demi-tour ; comme s'il n'avait jamais pu trouver le courage (ou la volonté) de traiter et d'essayer de saisir la France sans aucune référence aux concepts d'individu, de liberté et d'égalité. Par ailleurs, on peut de plus se demander pourquoi,

après avoir si bien dit que l'Inde n'est abordable qu'une fois pleinement compris le concept de pureté qui englobe l'ensemble des niveaux de la hiérarchie sociale, Dumont n'aurait pas pu ajouter que la France, elle, n'est compréhensible qu'à travers le holisme de la notion de travail, qui est peut-être, chez nous, encore plus englobante que la notion de pureté en Inde. Il faudrait prendre la peine de le démontrer, mais l'unanimité avec laquelle nos sociétés reconnaissent l'importance fondamentale et la dignité du travail fait que l'on dira peut-être un jour que jamais une « valeur » (dans le sens où l'utilise Dumont) n'aura entraîné de conséquences aussi profondes et marquantes sur une société. [Pourquoi sommes-nous ensemble dans cette salle ce soir ? Parce que, tous, nous faisons le même travail.]

Je termine ce bref commentaire sur Dumont en rappelant une anecdote apparemment banale mais qui me semble significative. Sans pénétrer les méandres de la politique française, il suffit de savoir qu'un jour Louis Dumont sentit le besoin de défendre ses positions en accordant une entrevue au *Nouvel Observateur*, dans laquelle il affirme que, malgré ce que certaines personnes en pensent et malgré tout ce dont on l'accusait, il demeurerait néanmoins un bon démocrate, profondément convaincu des mérites de la justice sociale et de l'égalité. C'est dire que, loin de l'Inde, le citoyen Dumont se trouve donc recentré et redevient un Français admirable, capable de faire preuve de ce qu'il désigne lui-même comme un « universalisme affligé d'un substantialisme spontané ». Le citoyen Dumont tombe dans le piège qu'il connaît pourtant bien et comme tous ses compatriotes, il est empreint de la supériorité de sa culture universelle et se veut, dans le fond, professeur de l'humanité entière. L'individu Dumont était donc d'abord Français, content de répondre aux questions du *Nouvel observateur* et fier de s'afficher démocrate égalitaire, et anthropologue ensuite. [Et par là, nous avons maintenant atteint la page 13.32.]

PART III

Although I am not at all familiar with the details leading to this interview with the *Nouvel Observateur*, it seems clear that Dumont had been brought into a very familiar modern political debate. He had to defend his work against accusations that it could be read as an apology for social injustice and human exploitation. And my claim is

that public debates of this sort are neither secondary nor marginal to discussions within our discipline. Politics is not out of our question. Last year, in Poland, during a ceremony of remembrance of the holocaust, a participant patiently read the personal names, one by one, of those individuals who were killed for the simple reason that they belonged to a particular social group. But in many other contexts, on the contrary, defending individual rights may turn out to support a rather conservative position. And then we ask: should the UN also work to preserve and protect collective cultural rights? Should we engage our energies in the endless struggle against selfishness, the way Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte did throughout their life, while at the same time laying the foundations of the social sciences?

My intention is not to suggest answers to these questions, but more simply to point out that any conceptualization of the individual and of society remains inevitably a political gesture. The same way that describing other cultures as "holistic" or "totalitarian" is also a political statement. With more time and inclination, we could even try and explore whether both Dumont and Barth, while being correct in their analyses (but not on the same details), remain, each, under the strong influence of his own particular political ideology. More to the point, I would rephrase Edmund Leach's assertion that "social structures are really ideas about the distribution of power" and submit to you that our concepts of individual and of society, and of the relation between the two, are really ideas about the distribution of power. This is little more than a suggestion to cast a slightly different look at some fairly well-known material. It could be taken as a straightforward case of placing the emphasis elsewhere.

First, we should not blame the ethnographers for having often and for so long reported on the totalitarian rule of custom from small scale societies around the world. Such social coherence and absolute cohesion can at times be very real, most ethnographers can testify to that. My modest suggestion is that we should pay more attention and at last recognize that totalitarian rule is, in practice, the outcome of hard work which requires complex social mechanisms and much cleverness. [On the other hand, although it is worth making a case for the very real presence and the importance of individuals in any society, it is perhaps not so surprising that the ethnographers who best reported these negotiating and strategically-minded individual

entrepreneurs were typically describing to us the lives of people such as Norwegian or Newfoundland fishermen. What else could they report? That these guys believe in a God whose mother was a virgin?] Secondly, although anthropology should confess, once and for all, that it has in the past often neglected the simple fact that human beings everywhere need to create a "self," at least in order to identify the place they should occupy in their own community, we should perhaps not spend too much time correcting this traditional bias and waste energy trying to demonstrate the obvious, that self-consciousness is part of the elementary conditions of human existence.

So, let us now return to the problem of finding a legitimate and significant base for a comparison between the Cuiva and a modern society that produces pornography. Both societies seem to share a passion for the individual, but the particular political adjustments between that individual and society appear to run in opposite directions. To make this point, let me draw a very short list of some of the examples from Cuiva society which should be part of a future demonstration, but without providing for each case the counter example from our own society, which I assume is already well known. First example: beyond repeating or criticizing the simplistic mention of "societies with history" and "societies without history," in the hope of casting a different look on this old theme, we should document how the Cuiva are careful to discourage any and all social occasions which could bring the recall of past events (except myths) and thus work hard at erasing historical memory. We should document better and at length how this historical amnesia extends to personal names, with the help of teknonymy, that is to say the practice of naming individuals "mother or father of so and so," which, given the fact that (because a person is named after the youngest child) names change regularly, bring the expected result that, fairly soon, no one else in society is likely to remember one's personal name. In Cuiva society, while life experience increases with age, identity fades.

In other areas, my enquiry would only require rephrasing some of our familiar interpretations. Second example: although I once argued that the familiar category of hunting-and-gathering societies is sociologically meaningless and merely the reflexion of a crude materialism which belonged to the racist evolutionary perspective of an earlier century [fear not, I argued this in French, and few people noticed], nevertheless, if for the

sake of this argument, we maintain the category a bit longer, what I am suggesting could mean that the sharing of food, which has long been central to anthropological analyses of this type of society and which has usually been understood as a tool for the collective insuring of subsistence, could now be also appraised in its more political dimension, as a mechanism for erasing individual differences. Through sharing food, by dissociating producer from product, we may have a case for the original alienating society.

If I had the time, but could afford only one example, the treatment of suicide would probably serve my purpose. Simply because suicide is perhaps the most self-centered human gesture, or, as the graffiti said, "the most sincere form of self-criticism." But also because, at least since Durkheim, it has often been taken as an ideal test of the relative weight of personal concerns and social constraints. Now, we all know how suicide is understood in our society as a human drama and a most profound individual crisis; the kinder side of our society may worry about driving some of its members to suicide, whilst the harsher side refuses to take the blame for the socially unadapted and incompetent individual. And of the most typical modern public debate concerns the individual's right to euthanasia and suicide. By contrast, Cuiva suicide is understood as a particular disease: with no previous warning, the brain is invaded by invisible butterflies, which then impinge on clear thinking, create confusion and lead their victim to suicide. In this explanation, there is no reference to personal worries, private troubles or depression. These nasty butterflies, as all other diseases, are sent to us by evil-wishers and, independent of will, the person is simply a victim of a vicious curse. The Cuiva individual is denied the right to suicide. And furthermore, because diseases can only be sent by enemies who are aware of one's personal private name, it thus seems clearly advisable to remain anonymous within the crowd. In the same vein, I could add that the Cuiva profess the theory that aging is only caused by stress, which translates into the belief that, without others, a person would not even age. Without others, the person would be nothing.

All this is certainly very rapid, but it does represent more or less what I am working on now, an effort to document the details of Cuiva society's war on the individual. I grant you readily that, as such, this is little more than writing the ethnogra-

phy of a much neglected aspect of our traditional anthropological stereotypes. After seeing others pay so much attention to the multiple ways of creating social division and inequality, I am trying to show that holism, the totalitarian rule of law, is nothing like a pristine state of society which could be taken for granted. But there is to my argument a bit more than that. And now I rejoin what I said earlier about the Hawthorn Report, in order to claim that the ideological treatment of the individual, or better still (again to paraphrase Leach), that the idea of the individual is an idea about the distribution of power in society.

Historians tell us that the Western notions of the "individual," as well as our now common notions of "freedom" and "equality," have developed precisely at the same time as the modern State became a most powerful instrument of social control. This was not a coincidence. Christopher Lasch said very well that modern man has lost much of his autonomy to the State bureaucracy and professionalization. More recently, Anthony P. Cohen replied that, however true, this, nevertheless, did not reduce his sense of self-consciousness. But another would add that the modern citizen holds on to self-awareness, to self-consciousness and self-interest, much like the last hope of a hostage victim of a kidnaping.

The inversion I am suggesting is straightforward enough: the dogmatic individualism of the modern times is a testimony to the power of the State. Indeed, the inversion seems a bit perverted when we hear of the strength of individualism in the twentieth century, precisely at the time when it becomes possible to throw 10,000 persons from airplanes off the coast of Argentina, or to massacre 120,000 Iraklis without a moment's concern for the fact that No. 62,358 was a very promising football player. And you know only too well that we could multiply these horrid examples. No one has to believe the twentieth century's claim that the totalitarian rule of custom is to be found ... elsewhere.

In some of those "elsewhere" situations, by contrast, the State (which I take here in a sense somewhere between that given to it by Clastres and by Rousseau) has to contend with the very real power of the individual. And precisely because, there, the State has far less autonomy. My example from the Cuiva shows that the individual, permanently under the influence of an ideology of denial of his/her own relevance, is remarkably free to

move over the territory, marry, divorce, associate with local groups or change band affiliation. It is even allowed [and it is probably with this incident that, as we say, I got the point] for an individual to suddenly leave his hammock, stand up, pick up bow and arrow and simply kill another human being, without society being able to do much about it [for those interested in the resolution of conflicts, the killer left the group for a few months and then returned and lived on, like the memory]. In other words, the individual appeared truly powerful and the Cuiva State weak; and someone should inform the old fascists that their nostalgia for a primitive absolute is seriously misplaced.

The general thesis behind my argument is that the State is always based on the familiar notion of the superiority of the collective and is permanently trying to assimilate society. This may certainly be a well-accepted notion and the State is often indeed popular, as when the vast majority of citizens wholeheartedly supported Adolph Hitler or Joseph Staline but the argument pretends also that the individual in society is forever resisting

the State. And that tension is predictable and more or less permanent. What I am mostly suggesting is that we should not be distracted by an ideological discourse which plays the crude functionalist role granted to it by crude Marxism: the old mirror image trying to smell like opium. The Cuiva individual, who spends a lifetime claiming to be socially anonymous and politically irrelevant, is in a real sense far more sovereign than the modern self-centered individual who masturbates freely in front of pornography [on this very point, before ending, I cannot resist noticing that the recent popular explosion of pornography coincides with anthropology becoming far more reflexive, introspective and self centered – I simply could not find a place to mention it before].

Finally, you may well ask: “What has this to do with ‘The King and You?’” The title is a form of summary. Only when the King is king can the individual be granted recognition. But when you are King and everyone else is also King, it is safer for all sovereigns to make absolutely certain that no King will ever be recognized.

