HIERARCHICAL REVERSAL TEN YEARS ON (AFRICA, INDIA, POLYNESIA), PART II: RODNEY NEEDHAM'S *COUNTERPOINTS*

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(translated by Robert Parkin)

THE defence and illustration of hierarchical reversal, undertaken in the first part of this article (*JASO*, Vol. XXV, no. 2, pp. 133–167), have led us to an orientated structure composed of two relations, the second being a 'descending' (top–down) transformation of the first.[1] This definition is situated at the interface between two questions. (1) Is holistic hierarchy a 'culture', i.e. a gradation of two or more references forming so many elements of a conception of the world proper to a given society; or is it a 'structure', a relation of relations? (2) Is reversal in this hierarchy a symmetric reversal of the same relation between two contexts functioning each for itself, which leads us back to a culture, or is it one of the variants of the relation of relations invoked?

The discussion must be continued while at the same time pursuing ever more ethnographies that present, as far as possible, a global society. But it has come under attack recently from the arguments that Needham has directed against the holistic idea of hierarchy, in which he sees only a theoristic imposture masking the realities that his binary analyses had already accounted for long ago. I have suggested that Needham (1987)—and also Beidelman (1989), whose comments all

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1. The other change of level, in the ascending (bottom-up) sense, accounts for ritual; it is not symmetric with the descending change of level, since it includes temporality (see Tcherkézoff 1989, 1993a).

refer back to Needham, without adding anything to the discussion—confuse everything and reduce the discussion to a matter of contexts, because they have made no effort to enter even a little into the presuppositions of the holistic approach, in which the object 'society' is a hierarchy of relations, ordered with reference to a more or less complete idea of attachment to the same whole. By adding to Part One of this article an examination of other scholarly critiques formulated by Needham, I hope to be able to bring this absence of understanding to a close.

Three other 'counterpoints' are posed by Needham in his work of that name (1987). The first is addressed to Dumont, through a refusal to understand the notion of a 'whole', and, above all, to myself; and Beidelman (1989) also refers to this critique of Needham's in his review of my book. How can it be said, exclaim these authors, that analyses like those in *Right and Left* neglect asymmetry when they speak only of pairs in which a positive term and a negative term are contrasted (in the ethnological translation of local cultural valuations) (Needham 1987: 120ff., 149–56)? Here again is proof that my reading of serious authors (in contrast to myself) remains on the level of mere 'reportage' (Beidelman 1989: 174). The second reproach is addressed to Dumont. In his propositions concerning reversal, Dumont talks of an 'articulate' hierarchy but does not explain it. Here again is proof that the obscurity of Dumont's ideas means that there are no ideas to be sought in the holistic vocabulary (Needham 1987: 140–45). The third is addressed to myself, with Beidelman again referring to it. What monologue am I presenting when I oppose the hierarchical method to the binary method? For, I am told, there has never been a 'binary method', and no one has ever claimed that the two-column tables have any lessons to teach concerning the ideology of the society under examination. There is considerable bad faith here, and I shall end by examining this evasion.

1. *Symmetry/Asymmetry*

To say that analyses aligning pairs as '+'/'-' ignore the presence of asymmetry in the data is no doubt provocative, but the remark I had made is salutary. It emphasizes the fact that, numerous though asymmetric examples might be, the binary view is still based on symmetry, since it regards matters as if value were merely an ideological presence added to the fact of the existence of the terms in nature. Right and left, then, are no more than the two sides of a sheet of paper divided by a vertical line that one has drawn. It is enough for this line to be centred in order that the boundary be an axis of symmetry. Indeed, not even its position is relevant in this logic: there is only right and left. One proceeds as if the social actor who classes certain things or individuals to the 'right' and to the 'left' was, as the source of meanings, as much outside the society as the person

who had traced the line on that sheet of paper exists outside that sheet and automatically defines left and right on the surface. In order to summarize this epistemological position, so heavy with consequences, I said that binary asymmetry is observed by starting from symmetry. Moreover, Needham chooses as an epigraph to one of the chapters in his *Reconnaissances* (1980), which includes another of his works on analogical classification, a quotation from Hermann Weyl, that says nothing less: 'Seldom is asymmetry merely the absence of symmetry. Even in asymmetric designs one feels symmetry as the norm from which one deviates under the influence of forces of non-formal character.' And when the asymmetry encountered in the ethnography is related back to a normative symmetry (in universal transcultural thought), as supporters of the binary mode do, all the relations at issue are analysed either as added measurements, whose explanation will necessarily be contextual, or as the forms of an eternal 'complementarity'. The symmetry 'felt' beneath the difference inclines one to the judgement that there is, at root, a universal complementarity. The problem is that this inclination is quickly extended to such social facts as 'power', 'politics' or 'the mystical', and that, in neglecting 'non-formal' forces and in supposing that symmetry is always primary, all content to social relations is withdrawn in advance, in order to leave in place simply a supposedly universal structure of the mind, which I said was just a receptacle for our spontaneous Western representations of the social.

Still with Needham, let us take the example of India. He has long considered India to be a case of complementary dualism. It is, he said, in a lecture of 1978 published in *Reconnaissances* (1980: ch. 3), a good example of the 'bipartition' of powers (ibid.: 75). India thus enters a long list in which Needham piles up examples of the 'binary structure of dual sovereignty' (ibid.: 105), i.e. the 'dyarchy defined as jural + mystical' (ibid.: 71), which is also the addition, according to Needham, of the 'temporal' and 'mystical', 'political' and 'spiritual', 'secular' and 'sacred', 'power' and 'authority', 'control' and 'influence' (ibid.: 93).[2] The Meru example was summoned anew into this list, and, in generalizing to all sorts of societies, the author again links it to his hypothesis, that of the complementarity of political and religious powers. This hypothesis had accompanied the analysis of the Meru case in 1960, which I had criticized in taking up the Meru ethnography again (Needham 1960, 1973, 1980; Tcherkézoff 1987: 15–26).

In those years, Needham none the less found some interest in the possibility that the Indian example, as reported by Dumont, represented a rather 'subtle' dualism:

Here in particular we see the operation of the principle of bipartition, with the special interest that the two powerful statuses exercise a joint sovereignty: the king, who is *kshatriya*, wields temporal power but is immediately dependent on the ritual

2. Needham presents all these pairs with the sign '+' in between the terms. For him, it is a logic of addition.

ministrations of the priest. The connection between the two, between power and priesthood, is a matter of great subtlety *and has been excellently treated by Dumont*, especially in his summation of the conception of royalty in ancient India. It would be *presumptuous of me* to express any judgement in this field, and I shall leave it with the observation that here we have a classic instance of dual sovereignty. (1980: 75; emphases added)

The last two phrases are particularly to be savoured when we compare them with remarks made in 1987, where Dumont is said to have presented 'a haphazard and inconsistent exposition of his own case. In effect, what was taken for a challenging theory turned out to be rather specious and incoherent rhetoric' (1987: 143).

In between, it is true, certain writings of the French holistic school have cast doubt on the interest of the analyses contained in *Right and Left*. Dumont asked that hierarchical opposition be added, and he cited, without polemical intent, Needham's collection as an example of works that reveal its interest by default (Dumont 1978). I took up the Meru case again, the origin of Needham's binary course and the example he used in subsequent works, in order to indicate that Needham's analysis had not answered the question it had posed, namely, 'Why is the left hand of the Mugwe sacred?' (Tcherkézoff 1987). Moreover, a year before Dumont's critical citation of Needham's collection, Augé (1977: 84) had criticized it by noting that it belonged to a type of anthropology in which 'more attention is paid to the symbol than to the symbolization', the latter being neglected in favour of analyses 'concerning fixed configurations' and reduced to being observed only 'at the end of the [ritual] process of creating them' and 'under the form of direct "symbolic" connections [...]: white = purification, black = danger or mourning [and of] the juxtaposition of several pairs [of this sort]'. The category criticized by Augé also includes the symbolic structure of royal incest according to de Heusch (1958), Nuer symbolism as reviewed by Beidelman, and the structure that, according to Leach (1966 [1959]), accounts for variations in local theories of heredity.[3]

On the question of symmetry and what results from it, the propositions of *Counterpoints* are very revealing of the substantialist approach. They boil down to a general critique aimed explicitly at a quite large group of models since, along with holistic models, Needham also rejects those of Bateson's concerning 'direct' and 'diagonal', 'complementary' and 'symmetric' dualism (Needham 1987: 189–95).[4] All these approaches are said to have been at fault in adopting a 'spatial' view and therefore a 'geometric' form of modelling, producing the false

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3. Augé gives no reference for Beidelman, but it is presumably Beidelman 1966 he is discussing here.

4. If one draws a parallelogram, the adjacent angles, linked 'directly', are 'complementary', the opposite ones, linked 'diagonally', are 'symmetric' (cf. distinctions between relations of the type brother–brother, elder–younger, as opposed to relations of the type sister–brother, at least where age is simply a secondary difference between social positions that, on the principal plane, are considered to be identical; see Tcherkézoff forthcoming).

idea of a 'monothetic' class. In fact, dualism in general is 'polythetic': no single model can take account of its variety.[5] The sole invariant is that 'there are dyads'.

This withdrawal into the unmentionable obscures the fact that every time Needham speaks of dualism, or examines a pair of terms, he thinks of the relation as starting from the 'addition' of the terms. Symmetry thus being saved, and the added value being able to roam at will, Needham can say that the only certain thing is that there is a human propensity to think in binary fashion and that, for the rest, everything is polythetic (I would translate this as 'value is contextual'). It is the holistic analysis that would become somewhat restricted. But, as we know, the problem resides elsewhere. Holism preoccupies itself with thinking of the terms starting from their relations (and thus thinking of the distinction between the terms starting from their attachment to the same whole). The only discussion that matters is this one. When a functional-structuralist analysis examines the coherence of a given society (and not only the coherence of the human mind), should we not systematically replace analyses in which one goes from the elements to their 'additions' with 'top-down' analyses that seek to deduce the elements from their attachment to a whole?

I thus think it justified to reserve the term 'asymmetry' for hierarchical oppositions, at least when one is discussing a configuration of levels, and especially reversal. In this sense, Needham's reversal in fact expresses symmetry. This is present in the relation of the first level, since one can no longer say that one element proceeds from the other and that the reverse is false. It is present in the connection between the two relations, for the second proceeds from the first as much as the first proceeds from the second; there is therefore no orientation. It is thus strange to see Beidelman and Needham, when explicitly criticizing my remarks, finding it incomprehensible that I should have addressed to them a reproach concerning symmetry. It is true that they state that all their examples are 'asymmetries' (right/left etc.); but the asymmetry invoked at first glance, where one limits oneself in brief to saying that 'right/left' is not the same thing as 'right/right', says nothing. Asymmetry only becomes sociologically relevant if it is referred to a whole. Until then, it remains the simple observation of a distinction, as with any symmetric opposition.

2. *The Place of Ideology in Reversal*

In Dumont's remarks concerning reversal and levels, mention is made of an 'articulate' hierarchy. Needham says that the term does not strike him as clear: Dumont's model 'adds nothing' apart from this strange mention of an 'articulate hierarchy', which is 'either obscure or disputable'; but he does not discuss it

5. Cf. Needham 1987: ch. 9, especially p. 236, on 'the indeterminacy of individual dyads'!

further.[6] Needham actually puts his finger on an important point here, one that is linked directly to the question of knowing where the global ideology ends. Indeed, we also meet in Dumont mention of a 'strict' sense of hierarchy, one tied to the alternation, in his words, between the notion of a 'set' and that of a 'whole', like this other alternative between a second level that remains in 'the ideological' or emerges only in the 'empirical'.

2.1 One or two hierarchies?

Before we go further, the reader must be given a warning. Dumont's remark concerning 'articulate' hierarchy certainly touches something that is at once a difficulty of a general kind and a particularity of the Dumontian sociology of India. But this does not in the least affect the fundamental logic of the hierarchical structure, which remains one of two levels, with a reversal between encompassment and distinction, and which accounts for the articulation between the social fact (encompassment) and the presence of the observer (the recognition of something familiar in the encompassed). As regards Dumont's remark, it is here that the distinction between the ideological and the empirical is mainly situated (1966: 58–9, 89, 106, 294ff.; 1978). Each society presents to view a particular way of attaching the element to the whole. Caste is one example (in which one defines oneself by protecting oneself from below, from an impurity emanating from others), the titles of Polynesia (in which one defines oneself by presenting oneself genealogically as more or less near to the original divinity) are another example, but we meet also with other classifications, even ones that are very familiar to us (to be 'of the right' or 'of the left')—and we should not think that these classifications are merely distinctive. On this plane, we progress towards the universal in generalizing, a little more each time, the structural modalities of social 'attachment'. But in other respects too there arises a comparison with our own situation: we necessarily give a name to the various 'elements' that manifest their attachment when we observe what they 'are' outside their sole attachment. This 'empirical' intrusion must be bound up with the ideology we meet with, while also being distinguished from it. In this general view of the comparative method, there is only one sort of hierarchy, and reversal always makes us leave the ideology, since reversal is only present, in the model, in order to put 'them' and 'us' on the anthropological stage or, to use different language, to bring out the gap between ideology and practice.

I have already indicated that, for Dumont, ideology presents something very general on the plane of 'ideas' (the set of ideas and values) that, left as such,

6. The passage in full is as follows: 'First, Dumont adds nothing to our general comprehension of this form of reversal; actually he says nothing at all about it, except (what is either obscure or disputable) that it is characteristic of hierarchy of the articulate type—a type, moreover, that has not been defined' (Needham 1987: 141–2).

would serve only to encourage all culturalisms, and something very particular on the formal plane: the first level, locatable because it is an encompassment. In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont proceeds rather from the first notion towards the second, which leads one to think that encompassment is a peculiarity of Indian ideology, whereas it is really the sign that the analyst is considering a global plane (the whole, or partial wholes, of a society). Nowadays, it is useful to generalize in another sense: it is the global ideology, in the sense of an organizational matrix of representations, the retrospective truth (syntactical reading) of the collection of practices, and not the reflection of some 'practical' level that is visible wherever we see encompassments. The primary level (of the hierarchy, in the holistic sense) is therefore always ideological.

We must examine the formal variation in this remark. For my part, I had distinguished unity and conjunction because the taxonomic tables of the Nyamwezi suggested it. But hierarchical logic (of which reversal is a part) is all one. Dumont spoke, in 1978, of 'encompassing the contrary, hierarchy in the strict sense' (Dumont 1986 [1978]: 230), making this remark after saying, 'we are dealing with a whole and not just with a set' (ibid.). A little earlier, he indicated that, to begin with, he had called 'hierarchical opposition' the 'simple type in which one term encompasses another' (ibid.: 228). Thus the relation set/element presents only two terms. It is a matter of 'a proper whole'. There is a double relation that the hierarchical model breaks down, namely identity and contrariety, for the nature of the set determines the nature of the element—they are 'consubstantial'—but the second is not simply identical to the first, since it is an 'element of' a part. This double relation, Dumont tells us, is 'stricter when a proper whole is concerned than when a more or less arbitrary set is involved' (ibid.: 227).

In order to explain these last words, Dumont refers to what follows, where he invokes oppositions of the type 'right/left' in dualist taxonomies. This type of opposition, in giving a society classificatory capacity, 'refers to a whole' (the human body and, by analogy, other 'bodies'), which immediately raises the point that the two terms are not in the same relation to the whole. At first sight, says Dumont, we do not fall into the 'simple type'. But in reality the logic is the same. One of the terms prevails on one level, for its function is 'more representative', meaning that it represents the whole more than the other term does. Thus, in the relation between the two terms, we find one level on which one term stands for the whole and the other does not. Following the logic I have already indicated here, this relation can be reversed. We have encountered Dumont's remark indicating, in this text, the possibility of reversal for oppositions of this type (reversal between 'asymmetric relations', in contrast to the immutable character of the symmetric opposition). The ambiguity left by Dumont has been noted. Reversal clearly does not give the other term the function of representing the whole (i.e. the same function), as if it could replace the role of the first term on the first level in identical fashion (there would then be a symmetrical reversal). The second term cannot become the encompassing one in its turn (though it can play a role within the first level; see sec. 2.4 below). But it can become *dominant* (inequality) on the

plane on which it is not defined uniquely as a consubstantial part but appears to be defined through its intrinsic nature, becoming then something differentiated from the whole.

In short, the opposition between a 'strict' hierarchy and a 'broad' hierarchy, between a proper 'whole' and a 'set', parallels the one I had already examined in my book (1987 [1983]), which distinguishes systems with two terms and systems with three (unity/conjunction). It does not appear to pose particular problems on the formal plane. On the other hand it does pose some problems when Dumont invokes the limits of *ideology*.

2.2 Articulate hierarchy

At this point, we return to Needham's query. He wonders if there is any connection between the absolute character of the superiority defining the first level and the fact that Dumont then talks of an 'articulate' hierarchy concerning the example 'priest/king'. This time, let us cite at length the passage in which Dumont makes this remark (previously, we limited ourselves to the formulation of the connection between priest and king). Dumont adds that the hierarchy constituted by this example is 'articulate', whereas the case in which the encompassing pole is directly the whole places us where things are less clear—one leaves the ideology:

> In matters of religion, and hence absolutely, the priest is superior to the king or emperor to whom public order is entrusted. But *ipso facto* the priest will obey the king in matters of public order, that is, in subordinate matters. This chiasmus is characteristic of hierarchy of the articulate type. It is obscured only when the superior pole of the hierarchical opposition is coterminous with the whole and the inferior pole is determined solely in relation to the former, as in the instance of Adam and Eve, Eve being created from a part of Adam's body. What happens here is that it is only on the empirical level—and thus not within the ideology proper—that a reversal can be detected, as when the mother comes to dominate in fact the [Indian] family in which she is in principle subordinate to her husband. (1986 [1978]: 252–3)

The remark is, to say the least, rapidly made, especially since Dumont does not return to the subject in what follows. Clearly, the 'obscured' chiasmus concerns the case of 'strict' hierarchy: the superior pole is the whole ($A = A + B$). The reversal is therefore not anticipated by the ideology, since the ideology is, as I have already suggested, a designation for level one, the level that describes the existence of an element to the extent that it belongs to a set–whole. In this formal definition of ideology—which corresponds, I believe, to what Dumont's remark implies but which does not appear as such in his writings—it becomes perfectly logical to adopt a different designation for the practice defined by the second level.

Dumont's selection of the term 'empirical' is not innocent, but an ironic glance at the reflective, long-standing Anglo-Saxon construction, in which the fundamental plane is that of the *practical* or *pragmatic*, explaining the superior plane of 'ideology' (in the sense of 'reflection', not of 'value'); or else, it was the plane of the 'profane', understood as complementary to the 'sacred' (also called the 'religious' or *mystical*). This choice is also a reminder of the 'comparative' method that is dear to Dumont. The socio-cultural particularity of a society is obtained through the relation between what observation presents as ideology (in formal terms, encompassments) and what it presents as supplementary, i.e. what the observer 'sees' but what the ideology does not account for directly (Dumont 1966: 58 and other references cited above), something empirical for the observer, a 'residue' (but one which can be very important quantitatively) with regard to ideology and, in formal language, as I try to stress here, an 'encompassed' level.[7]

The whole force of this method comes from the equivalence that strikes the observer concerning these three notions. If the empirical alone were to the fore, one could not control interpretative abuses: the observer would believe himself to be recognizing things that can have no sense in the whole of that society (economist or 'politicist' abuse, political or state bias, etc.). It would be enough to say that observation concerns a residual domain, an elegant way of saying that the society does not 'see' it, and one could then rig out the unconscious or the alienation of the people concerned in all sorts of clothes. Comparison only begins when what one thinks one has 'recognized' can be formally deduced from the ideology, i.e. encompassed, whence the crucial importance of *hierarchical reversal* in this method, which is, I would say, when all is said and done, a formal means of tying the observer intimately to the society under consideration.[8]

7. We have seen in Part One how reversal necessitates the building of a non-ambiguous formal model of two levels. As a result, we must build a non-ambiguous formal model of 'ideology', whence my stress on 'encompassed' for what Dumont calls the 'empirical'. The term 'residue' that Dumont uses is also intended to evoke the process of observation. The main ideology tells the anthropologist nothing of the whys and wherefores of the practice he is currently observing. But this term does not in any way mention the extension that these facts might occupy in the whole society. As Dumont says in brief, the term contains no 'ontological prejudice' concerning observed fact (1972: 75). The residue is simply what remains once our observation, in its entirety, has been referred to the ideology we encounter, not everything being directly explicable by the ideological 'system'.

8. One will therefore distinguish concepts that are properly anthropological, such as encompassment (where one might place the Maussian 'sacred'), which belong to a *structure* obtained through a generalization of the relation between an 'observer' and a 'whole' (the 'society'), from culture-centric notions, such as inequality and power, for example. Clearly, this does not mean that these notions must be rejected by the anthropological endeavour. On the contrary, it would be naïve and dangerous to want to go beyond cultural a prioris at the outset and to forget that anthropology is a science that has been elaborated within a particular (Western) culture, not within any sort of ether of objective knowledge. But these notions will only be recognized in the ethnography when a relation of subordination to the whole of that

All this would no doubt require a profound examination. Yet, within the grand lines that I have sketched out in broadly emphasizing the formal constraint, in order to rein in the culturalist type of interpretation, the hierarchical structure and the vocabulary that designates its elements are defined on a one-to-one and operative basis. How, then, should we regard this supplementary remark of Dumont's, made in passing, asserting that reversal in the Indian example is of the 'articulate' type? Let us admit our confusion, which on this point matches Needham's.

If we make the hypothesis that Dumont considers the second example, that of the 'obscured' chiasmus (man/woman), in distinctive opposition to the first (priest/king in India), this means that the Indian example is equally opposed to the fact—characteristic of the second example—that the reversal takes place outside the ideology. We would then have to conclude that the level of power in India, on which the king dominates the priest 'in matters of public order', is situated, from his point of view, within the ideology. Now this would contradict the many remarks in *Homo Hierarchicus* in which Dumont places the fact of power well and truly in the 'non-ideological' (1966: 59, 100–108, ch. 7, 354 etc.).

If we maintain the formal definition of the level of the ideology (the encompassments), the priest's obedience to power is, in the Indian case, placed irremediably outside the ideology. This clearly does not mean that it is a matter of unconscious practice. And, of course, if we were to modify the definition of ideology to include all the 'conscious' practices within it, everything would be situated within the ideology. But this ideology is not in question. Already, in his 1962 text on kingship, Dumont had noted the 'ideological' aspect of the relation priest/king, the spiritual superiority, *and* the aspect he called 'practical', material dependence (cited above). At the same time, he indicated that the Brahmans, since the far-off time of the Brahmanas, 'if they more often proclaimed their spiritual preeminence, were also at the same time conscious of being temporally dependent' (1970 [1962]: 66). Yet indications concerning the unconscious or less conscious character of the second level abound with Dumont (see Part One, page 144, note 7).

Here we reach the very heart of the whole discussion. By not stressing the formal definition, or rather because this is only recognized later and is thus absent from the 1962 text and from part of *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont remains within the language of the interpretation of values.[9] At the same time, he discovers from

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society can be posited, i.e. whenever these notions define an 'encompassed level' (cf. the discussion in Adler 1987; Tcherkézoff 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995).

9. One can see how the 'consciousness' of the ideology is constructed in part through the observer's decision: 'Yet on certain points we shall take the liberty of completing and systematizing the indigenous or orthogenic theory of caste...by postulating that men in a society behave in a coherent...manner'; this comes just after the author has observed that the tradition explicitly distinguishes between caste status and power; 1972 [1966]: 74. Moreover, decision intervenes in declaring as 'systematic' that which includes the practice of the extremes (see Part One, page 158, note 16).

the outset that the fundamental relation, that between the two principles of *brahman* and *ksatra* (priesthood and purity / kingship and domination), is not distinctive but hierarchical (subordination but inclusion, inclusion but contrariety). It is always 'within the religious universe' and 'in a society that continues to be under the rule of *dharma*' (which the *brahman* principle can represent on its own) that *artha* acts ('interest', 'directed' by politico-economic action—politics and economics are not distinguished in the treatises on *artha*). And yet, says Dumont, *artha* is the 'negation' of *dharma*: 'The political sphere is separated from the domain of values [*dharma*]...*artha* is recognized only in the second place, we may say in matters indifferent to *dharma* [but] *artha* finally remains contained within the all-embracing *dharma*' (Dumont 1970 [1962]: 78).[10]

We know from elsewhere that the *ksatra* principle is, from the earliest period, associated with *brahman* in defining the two pillars, the two 'forces' of the system in India, at least in learned discourse (1966: 93ff., 352). Finally, it is clearly difficult to make the whole Indian institution of royal power and rights over the soil pass into the non-ideological (in the usual sense); *artha* is an 'end' that is recognized in the texts, but for Dumont it is 'hierarchically' inferior. The king also 'knows' that the priest, especially his chaplain, is 'in front of' him, for he himself cannot carry out the sacrifice, and he knows that he 'keeps power only for himself' (ibid.: 356). Dumont sometimes admits the difficulty. Having presented the principle that distinguishes ideology from the encompassed residue, he says that what thus appears to be an extreme simplification of an ethnographic situation, which every time and on every occasion is in reality complex, means that '[in short], the distinction is between the conscious and the unconscious aspects' (Dumont 1972: 321, n. 22c),[11] adding straightaway:

> and this is a relative and not an absolute distinction. This is true; for example, the politico-economic aspects are indeed not wholly absent from the consciousness of the people concerned. They are even written about.... But just as in the literature taken overall these aspects are subordinated to the religious ones, so they are practically excluded from that constellation of strongly marked and interconnected ideas and values which form the ideology (or perhaps the main or predominant ideology) of the social system. There is certainly room for inaccuracies and inadequacies in such a definition of the conscious nucleus of the system. (ibid.)

But, continues the author, the advantages to be drawn from this distinction are greater than the drawbacks associated with the definition—in effect, without this

10. In this text as in others, one can see that Dumont uses 'values' in the plural while designating on the first level, *the* domain of values, that of ultimate values; and politics, the second level, is separate '*from* the domain of values' (1970 [1962]: 86). In similar language, one can say that the first level is that of 'the' value (Dumont 1982).

11. The two words given in square brackets here, significant in this context, were omitted from the English translation.

distinction, comparison in the sense Dumont intends is no longer possible. Elsewhere and on other topics, Dumont considers that a distinction of levels can be present entirely in the conscious (1982: 218 n. 4).

2.3 Comparison

I will make the following hypothesis. Dumont's whole view here depends greatly on his perception of history, in India and in general. The differentiation between power and religion is a 'secularization' (the quotation marks are Dumont's) that is produced 'within' religion (ibid.). In the hypothetical history of India and, even more, in the universal course of evolution suggested by Dumont, a secular power is always a *secularized* power, issuing from a prior form of 'magico-religious' kingship (1970 [1962]: 68; cf. 1966: 71, 100 n., 269; more recently, 1986: 47–8).

The difficulties in characterizing the second level as contrary but included when it concerns a central institution and a principle widely recognized in the learned literature are encountered fully when the author brings together the 'ideological' and the 'conscious'. It is impossible to say that the Brahmans are not conscious of their 'empirical' dependence (cf. quote above). At the same time, the second level is outside value 'in matters indifferent to value', being in a different state of relation to the whole: whence a hesitation, and variable formulations concerning the 'least conscious'.

I believe these ambiguities stem from the fact that Dumont, in the early 1960s, retained something of an evolutionist conception (the magico-religious origin) and a relatively Hocartian view of values (though presented without its indispensable Hocartian complement, a theory of ritual action); a priori, religion is chosen as the domain of integration:

> As we live in an egalitarian society, we tend to conceive of hierarchy as a scale of commanding powers—as in an army—rather than as a gradation of [ranks and] statuses.... Further, the very word hierarchy, and its history, should recall that the gradation of status is rooted in religion: the first rank normally goes, not to power, but to religion, simply because *for those societies* religion represents what Hegel has called the Universal, i.e. absolute truth, in other words because hierarchy integrates the society in relation to its ultimate values. (1970 [1962]: 67; emphasis added)

The differentiation of functions is produced within religion (a universal fact, in the sense of Hocart 1978). On the other hand, and in an insight that entered later into Dumont's work (i.e. after 1962), the Indian hierarchy of 'human ends' (*dharma/artha*) becomes a specific formal model, 'the encompassment of the contrary' (Dumont 1966: 9). Any domain of (ultimate) values is then both an auto-reference and thus locally 'universal', *and* an inclusion of the contrary. The researcher then becomes aware too that this duality is itself tied to the epistemological connection between the society and the observer (the latter is culturally present through his recognition of the encompassed).

Ultimately, ideology is not defined clearly. Is it religion, or religion 'for these societies'? How should we then characterize the situation of representations and practices that are outside this religion? As secondary values less constraining for consciousness? As a universal–historical development, which only becomes fully conscious if it becomes autonomous, escaping encompassment, as when it 'leaves the world' (Indian renouncer, early Christians), or when, as in the case of Christianity, it becomes, in the next stage, the encompasser of a new world (Dumont 1983)? But does Indian hierarchy then represent a moment of evolution, and is encompassment of the contrary a model accounting only for some societies, those 'traditional' ones that represent a particular evolutionary stage or, at least, a type within a typology of cultures–societies? We will say rather that ideology is the primary level of any hierarchy, in which case the second level is at once non-ideological and fully 'conscious'.

'Religion' is, for Dumont, this local universal which, under a good many different forms, presents the formula for integration. But we then require the most formal definition possible, in order that the 'contrary' of integration, this 'empirical' element, be only the encompassed part of the integration. This generalization is possible, but it requires us in turn to call into question the evolutionist and culturalist typology of societies. We would then leave the particularist consideration of 'these societies', which Dumont calls 'traditional' when differentiating them both from the 'modern' case and from those of 'tribal' or 'simple' societies in which value is perhaps not a sort of Hegelian universal or 'religion' (1966: 71, 100 n.; 1986 [1978]: 215). And we would envisage hierarchy as a structure capable of accounting for any concrete totality for a universalist anthropological view, whether it is a matter of a 'traditional', 'modern' or 'tribal' totality.

I cannot pursue this discussion here, which would open up the whole debate about the comparative method in anthropology. But the matter had to be raised in order to conclude the discussion on the distinction between an 'articulate' (and less strict) hierarchy, a 'set', and another, 'obscured' hierarchy (hierarchy 'in the strict sense'), a 'proper whole'. The formal difference does not seem profitable. On the contrary, as soon as one invokes it on the plane of reversal, it leads to a single model, the bidimensional model, as Dumont calls it (1982: 225). In short, the presence of two levels accompanies the configurations of unity as well as those of conjunction (in my vocabulary of 1983). And if we were to give a meaning other than the formal one to opposition, we would have to move towards a typology of societies. We would have to admit that, for 'certain' societies ('traditional' holism), the anthropological concepts of 'value', status 'hierarchy' and 'global' attachment designate the same reality as 'religion' does with us. In this case, reversal would then be partly or completely ideological, for, as is well known, one never leaves the Hegelian universal even when contradicting it.[12]

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12. One can even try to specify in this way, or in a fashion inspired by it, 'cosmomorphic' or 'socio-cosmic' societies. For those who use this vocabulary, the levels observable in the society can consist of different types of ceremonial exchange, and one does not then see how only

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However, one cannot then very easily see how one might escape culturalism in order to delimit this type of society. As I have suggested, the notion of 'levels' is very quickly lost in returning to a view of contexts, which is incapable of expressing anthropologically the idea of 'totality'.

In conclusion, I will follow the path of not retaining on the formal plane the distinction proposed in such an allusive fashion by Dumont, and which so intrigued Needham. On this point, Needham's query was useful. Yet he should have examined this distinction, instead of rejecting it a priori, for, in suggesting that reversal can occur 'outside the ideology', it has the merit of posing the problem *of* the ideology.

2.4 The breadth of the first level

This said—and it is quite a different problem—the distinction Dumont proposes can also evoke the fact that, in India, the connection between 'dominant' power and the priest is double: one part comes under the religious relation, the other is situated within that of domination. When the sacrificiant–householder, dominant in village or kingdom, employs a sacrificer–purificator, he makes him a sacred gift, which is the counterpart of the ritual service. This action is situated in the relation in which the priest is superior (encompassing). At the same time, these gifts form a part of every relation in which the ritual specialist depends materially on the employer. In this sense, the action of power here takes on a double aspect (but the term 'power' is only valid for the second aspect), a consequence of this particularity of the system in which the relation to the whole passes through the sacrificer and not through the sacrificiant. Part of what the priest receives from the king (or from his equivalents) is situated 'ideologically' on the first level; but this part, in which royal action (and its equivalents) is sacred, is clearly not yet a manifestation of 'domination', even though access to resources (the source of domination) is logically prior to the fact that the king can make gifts.

The 'articulate' hierarchy can serve to designate this order of facts: one part of royal activity is clearly 'religious', on the level in which the determinant of the relation is not the king but the priest. One might enlarge on this comparison and say that, within the encompassing level (and, therefore, before crossing the barrier of reversal) the relation can present a double aspect. Thus in certain cases (in Oceania), it can be accompanied by a double circulation of ceremonial goods, in

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certain of them would be in the ideology (Barraud *et al.* 1984, Barraud 1990, de Coppet 1990). As a result, the Dumontian distinction 'ideological/empirical'—which is, however, the key to the comparison—becomes blurred. Then, 'reversal' (which can be reduced to symmetric reversal) is only one of a number of possibilities of perceiving gradations of level (Barraud *et al.* 1984). These divergencies concerning the holistic method indicate sufficiently that reflection on the epistemology of reversal is useful; see Tcherkézoff 1994.

which goods coming from the pole that stands for the whole are superior to those that come in the reverse direction, just as the householder's payment compensates in India for a ritual service that is superior in value. On the other level, the relation is modified, with another circulation of goods or with another aspect taken by the second circulation of the first level, and the one who gave (on the first level) from an inferior position (or what he gave) can become superior within this second level (but this time the superiority is one in terms of 'domination'). But the breadth that the first level can acquire does no damage to the unity of the three 'hierarchical' formulas I have emphasized, and which *Homo Hierarchicus* and other texts of Dumont's suggest while leaving the door open for other, more culturalist constructions.

In Samoa—to remain in the partial configuration that constitutes relations between the sexes (see section one of Part One)—a double arrow can be used to mark the brother–sister relationship that occupies the first level. The fine mats, symbolically encompassing,[13] circulate in one direction and constitute only a part of the sister–brother relationship (but the part constituting the symbolization, calling for a symbolic association). In return, the brother gives the pigs. This return completes the cycle but—considered in itself, opposed to the gift of mats—it is an inferior gift.[14] The brother is 'masculine' and 'strong' in order that he can 'do the work' required to search for food. But on this level, this 'force' is said to be 'at the service of the village', which itself is a circle of titles (each of which is perpetuated by the sister–brother relation). Only when one crosses the barrier of hierarchical reversal can the masculine 'force' become 'dominant' and thus no longer orientated to value. Similarly, in the ritual relationship between the brahman and the king in India, the ritual gift of life (purification) and the sacred return gift remain on the first level, while the aspect of domination of 'the employer' opens up the second level.

Ritual in general and ceremonial circulation in particular have much to teach us concerning the breadth of the first level of the hierarchy. But it is better to enter into this research without allocating different types of hierarchy (articulate/implicit, or others) in advance. Thereafter, we can turn our attention to the facts that have been collected and reopen the question.

13. The term 'symbolic' is used here in the sense of a dynamic view of ritual—not an object 'representing' something, but the partial term of a syntactic chain that only has meaning retrospectively (Tcherkézoff 1989). In this case, completeness comes from the association between 'mats' and 'pigs'. The ritual works a *symbolization*, which is something other than analogical 'symbolic' relations (see above, sec. 1; see also Augé 1977).

14. It is inferior in the sense of being a less complete representation of value. The mat belongs to the side of 'heaven', which itself encompasses the side of 'earth' (and 'night') from which the pigs come.

3. *The Binary Method*

Having made clear the relevance of hierarchical reversal, I have now traced the limits of a connected question, that of the relation to ideology. In these two stages, I have considered what is essential in the criticisms that Needham has addressed to the holistic idea of hierarchy. I will complete this traverse by briefly mentioning a supplementary argument that Needham has directed towards myself.

The same blindness that has me reproaching the binary mode with maintaining symmetry (see sec. 1 above) also has me seeing a 'method' in this binary mode, so as to be better able to oppose it to the supposedly hierarchical method, whereas, Needham asserts, analyses of the type found in *Right and Left* have never pretended to define a method. On the contrary, they clearly state that it is solely a matter of a mode of exposition, a simple 'mnemonic device' (see below).

3.1 To aid the memory...

The discussion deserves presentation and will respond, in anticipation, to a query that the reader will not fail to raise. At root, he will ask, why this polemic? If it is obvious that the analyses in binary mode of the classifications encountered do something else entirely (or the reverse), since they compare analytically the 'additions' of terms (see sec. 1 above) instead of deducing the terms from the hierarchy of relations, why discuss them together? There would indeed be no need to waste time in this way if, as well as using a different method, the binary mode were aimed at a totally different object than the holistic one. In fact, Needham never stops repeating that, behind 'collective representations', the object he is seeking to isolate is types of 'cerebral' movement, the 'innate' form 'of vectors of individual cerebral activity' (Needham 1981: 4 and *passim*; also 1980: 3–15, 99–105; 1983; 1987; cf. Khare 1983; Karp 1985). Let us note in passing that this slender result (the omnipresence of the 'complementarity' between two terms) is somewhat disproportionate in light of the efforts made.

But—and here is the entire problem—the analysis is not content with noting the conceptual existence of pairs of all sorts, in the course of an enquiry into a mixture of ethnographies. Halfway through the traverse appear binary tables that characterize *one* given society (Needham 1960, on the Meru; 1967, on the Nyoro) or *one* given institution (1980: ch. 3, on dual sovereignty), even when the author continues to speak of cerebral dualism. The lesson delivered, even implicitly, is more precise, such as a functionalist theory of *power* (see sec. 1 above, and below; Tcherkézoff 1987: secs. 1.3, 4.2).[15] It will be remembered, for example, that the

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15. Let us add that the polemic is the only thing of Needham's taken up by Beidelman 1989. We have seen (above, sec. 1) that, in 1978, Needham was not sparing in his praise of Dumont's Indian analysis. Now, the 'critiques' by Dumont (1978) and Tcherkézoff (1983) with regard to binary tables were not intended to open a polemic. Dumont contented himself with noting the

analysis of the Meru case begins with Needham trying to understand the status of the left hand of the Mugwe sacred chief, which is always hidden but has magic powers. It is thus a question of value, the answer to which is provided in the society's own terms, and not a question of the Meru's capacity to distinguish left and right in general.

Needham's discourse consists of two versions that appear to me to be incompatible. We are told that the binary tables teach us only universal mental forms. But, in reality, they speak to us also of particular social wholes. We are also told that the tables mean nothing: they are only a 'device'. But we are also told that they teach us something concerning the recurrence of certain relations between certain specific categories (see below).

The tables are of no use; thus there is no reason to see in them a method, says Beidelman (1989) referring explicitly to Needham, who makes the same reproach against myself and Dumont (1987: 115, 151–2). And, in *Counterpoints*, Needham himself refers me to assertions of his published previously (1973: xxiv; 1980: ch. 2). The representation in two columns, he says, is content with assembling data under a form making it easy to recall the binary recurrence; the columns are only 'mnemonic devices'. However, the author adds that this device is useful because it is 'a conventional figure that helps one to recall the cumulative effect of the argument' (1973: xxv; cited 1987: 115).

What, then, is this cumulative effect? In common logic, it cannot be simply a matter of the dualistic form ('there are dyads'): on this plane, the examples do no more than unravel a prior generalization. I had stressed this, namely that it is

interest there was in 'adding' hierarchical opposition to the structuralist arsenal and mentioning in passing the objects treated in *Right and Left*. I took up the Meru case as treated by Needham in order to show that, using exactly the same sources as those used by Needham (Bernardi 1959), the view that the Mugwe encompassed the power of the elders was valid. This was, I said, an incentive for thinking that binary analysis, which actually goes no further than formal conclusions, because it is aiming from the outset at establishing a universal mental functioning in the course of a particular ethnography, (1) does not exhaust the possibilities on this plane, and (2) would deliver false conclusions if it alone remained to the fore from the moment when the object of study is stipulated as 'Meru representations of authority'. Now, from the conclusion supported by Needham concerning powers in Meru society, the object of study was clearly this, among others (1987: ch. 8). Needham's latest long reply concerning the Meru ethnography indicates that he has not understood the goals that I had been pursuing. What is the use now of bringing in other sources and saying that, because I had found data concerning a 'subtribe' different from the one on which he had centred his analysis equally significant for my purpose, my criticism is unacceptable, as if the debate concerned the subtribe given? We might note in passing that this lack of understanding shows that, in this passage, Needham really is interested in a particular society, and not just in universal 'cerebral' forms. But before speaking of such-and-such a subtribe, it is necessary to distinguish—I ask for nothing more—the purposes of the study. As soon as these touch on a question of value for the particular culture encountered and/or a relation between positions of authority in a particular social organization, the binary method becomes insufficient; and sometimes it leads to false conclusions.

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necessary to postulate the dualistic mental universe in order to be able to identify the pairs (which is how all these pairs are grasped in substantialist fashion) (Tcherkézoff 1987). The cumulation is rather that which indeed has its 'effect' while each column is being extended through the observer garnering his distinctive oppositions. The author can go on repeating that a single column constitutes no unitary meaning as much as he likes—this will not prevent the reader from finding significance in the fact that the cumulation of examples reinforces, at each step, a common relation between a '+' term and a '-' term.

3.2 ...in noting the mystification of the feminine

The matter becomes very clear—and the anthropological lesson very close to error—when Needham, if only in passing, takes up the symbolism of the sexes (gender qualities). At the end of his article on 'Analogical Classification' (1980: ch. 2), he emphasized the integrating capacity of analogy with respect to what he calls 'hierarchy' (classification through branching: genus/species/sub-species; 'logical division'). Anything can enter into analogy, 'anything can be assimilated, in some respect or another, to anything else, so that a classification could be extended practically without limit' (ibid.: 59). However, marvels the author, a small number of categories prevail statistically. He continues: 'One especially impressive example is the symbolic complex right : left :: masculine : feminine :: jural power : mystical authority' (ibid.: 60).

We have already, it seems to me, left the simple universal dualism and find ourselves again in functionalist terrain (the equilibrium of powers, the complementarity of the 'real' or 'pragmatic' and the 'symbolic' or 'mystical'; ibid.: ch. 3). The article following that on analogy, which concerns 'Dual Sovereignty' (ibid.), already mentioned, confirms this impression. Here, among other examples, Needham returns to the symbolic complex of gender and power concerning the brother–sister relationship in the Ryukyu Islands, following Mabuchi's celebrated text (1964; Needham ibid.: 86–8). We thus come back to the cultural (or at least thematic) area of this relationship that led me, while observing it in Polynesia several years ago (i.e. since 1984, and more especially since 1987), to consider that it was necessary to start reflecting again on hierarchical opposition.

Mabuchi, of course, formulated things in the language of his time, that is, in functionalist terms, which removes nothing from the perspicacity he showed at a period in which one hardly imagined that the brother–sister relationship could be the centre of a social organization. Thus he generalizes his data through expressions such as 'the sister takes the lead in ritual life and her brother in secular life' (cited in Needham 1980: 87). Needham, twenty years later, builds on this formulation: 'generally speaking, sisters assume the role of spiritual patroness to their brothers, while the brothers are expected to protect their sisters in secular life' (ibid.: 86). Immediately afterwards, the author speaks of 'the mystical function', which manifests itself above all when the brother is in danger. Thus one of the

two columns of the table is already achieving autonomy for itself. Moreover, of the brother he says, 'his distinctly secular role is clearly stated, and it appears that he has some jural control over his sister' (ibid.: 87–8). Can one still maintain that the lesson here is confined strictly to 'cerebral dualism'? On the contrary, the 'cumulative effect' of the different pairs certainly achieves its effect. Besides, since the Ryukyu data are very similar to those from western Polynesia,[16] I can confirm with some certainty that this way of characterizing the relationship is as inadequate as its equivalents proposed recently for Samoa. Better still, we see Needham, later in this article, finally becoming more interested in the content of each column than in the relation that unites them. Having come to a conclusion once more concerning 'complementarity', he adds: '*Rather more striking* are those features which have to do with the imagery of the mystical, for they are logically independent yet they have a remarkable recurrence.... The *most prominent* images of the mystical...are darkness, femininity, passivity, and the left' (ibid.: 89; emphases added). The association of the mystical and therefore 'of things unseen' with darkness is a commonplace, continues Needham (ibid.: 89). Following the argument, he recalls that the colour 'proper' to the Mugwe of the Meru, as well as that of his ritual objects, is black. In *Dual Classification Reconsidered* (1987), I noted the possibility that this might be a considerable error. In the entire region, according to the statements of those concerned, black can characterize the sacred through a *valued* connotation acting as intermediary, evoking the rain (low, heavy clouds) that fertilizes the earth. This is precisely the hierarchical reversal of white as a sign of the burning sun, the sign of drought and death, and this reversal is clearly given in the ritual (ibid.). It is therefore far from obvious that *our* Western commonplace (belief = things hidden) has anything to do with matters here. And if it were necessary to chose between the poles '+' and '-', I would lay a bet that the black of the Mugwe is a positive sign (a power of life) and certainly not a negative sign of a supposed feminine passivity (in the sense of something contrary to the production of life).

The association between the mystical and the feminine has long been noted, says Needham again (1980: 90). And 'the Mugwe appears to be associated analogically with the feminine'. 'Passivity' is also contained in the basket: it 'may or may not be thought to be connected with femininity'. And he recalls that the Mugwe does not try to seduce young girls when he is a young man; when married, he remains abstinent for long periods, and it is his wife who must take the initiative in the sexual act, this rule being part of the instruction he receives from the elders before his marriage. Needham does not pursue the matter, except quickly to cite the fact that Lugbara diviners were equally known, when young, to

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16. The ritually efficacious sororal object is a piece of cloth, the efficacious gesture is the wrapping up. The sister's spirit can be transferred to the brother's person. She can also inflict misfortune through a curse and, as on Samoa, when that is said of sisters, it is also said that they do not do it intentionally, but that misfortune will strike the brother if he does something seriously displeasing to his sister (for Samoa, cf. Schöeffel 1979).

be 'either impotent or uninterested in women' (Middleton, cited by Needham ibid.: 91). The reader is thus led to retain by default an association between the category of the mystical, that of the feminine, and a sort of absence of sexual virility. The substantialist complex feminine–mystical–hidden–passive is reinforced by this enormous error, supposing that the absence of any heterosexual or simply sexual orientation on the part of a man of sacredness allows him to be placed or retained in the feminine column. The degree of error to which the constraints of the *binary method* lead in demanding a logic of 'either/or' (here, feminine–passive *or* masculine–active in a heterosexual way) can readily be seen. The sociological phenomenon of the *third sex* is thrown out in advance.[17] The sexual prohibitions that sacred persons must bear are well known (African sacred kings, women as 'sisters' in western Polynesia, etc.). But it is also known that the position occupied by these persons is defined precisely as one that transcends distinctions (Adler 1978, 1979, 1982; Tcherkézoff 1987: 50–51, 69ff., 114–15; Yamaguchi 1974). The supposed 'feminine passivity' (of the man or woman in charge of the sacred) can at the same time be the sign of a *prohibition*, which is itself a sign of the elevation of status and a means of ritual efficacy (Tcherkézoff 1989). In the Samoan case, the sacred woman (the 'sister') belongs to a specific level that encompasses as its *contrary* the opposition of the sexes (in the sense of sexuality). Also, the 'beyond' of the distinctions can itself reproduce the primordial stage, before any distinction, the archetypal singular and uniform 'whole' of the cosmogonies, in which, at a given moment, some distinction is introduced, some asymmetry appears, thus designating the place of humanity or of the society to come (Tcherkézoff 1987: 63–4, 90, 96–7, 114–15, 127ff.; cf. Part One, on unity). The consequence introduced by the binary method is one of no longer allowing the apperception of these various hierarchical configurations to take place. In order to evoke the collection of impasses that analyses of the *Right and Left* type erect, even though involuntarily, I have spoken, and will continue to speak, of the 'binary method'.

17. Phenomena called 'the third sex' group together very different cases of ambivalence (the androgynous, in myth or ritual), of the encompassment of one sexual category by another (the empirically observable gender of an Inuit child can be overridden by that of the ancestor who 'lives again' in it), and of one beyond the distinctive opposition of the sexes (those with sacred authority). Saladin d'Anglure (1985, 1986, 1988, 1989), who has studied the phenomenon particularly and introduced the well-known Inuit example, noted at the outset, entirely unpolemically, that the binary method was inadequate here—and he referred his readers to my critique of it. For my part, I would speak of a totalizing logic concerning sexual dualism. This third gender goes beyond the usual distinctions, whether of the form A » B (among the Inuit, the gender of the reincarnated ancestor overrides that of the child in possible conflicts between these two references), or of the form (A + B) (androgynous sacred kings, etc.). On the other hand, an example like the Samoan one lays claim to the title of 'third sex': the *teine* (virgin) is neither *fafine* (woman) nor *tamaloa* (man) (on Samoa, see Tcherkézoff 1992, 1993b).

4. *Conclusion*

The example of the two classifications that are referred to the two hands, right and left, has been the main thread and heading of a discussion that has aimed at bringing in hierarchical opposition too as a possibility, so as to make understood specific social logics in which the representation is elaborated top–down, from the set to the element. In this view, right and left refer to a 'whole' and not to the universal of substantialist positions. Needham has quite uselessly added polemics to the discussion. It sufficed him to say that, in effect, in the type of analysis he pursues, right and left are not referred to a whole. He says it now; the whole of *Counterpoints* could be limited to this paragraph:

> What others have missed, Dumont thinks, is the recognition that the right/left pair cannot be defined in itself, but only in relation to a whole.... To begin with, then, it is a truism that the opposition right/left cannot be defined in itself: the terms can be defined only in relation to something else. But it is not true that they can be defined only in relation to something that constitutes a whole. The arbitrary stipulation of a point of reference, combined with a given point of observation, is perfectly sufficient. The point of reference could be a map reference in a featureless desert, or the beam of a flashlight in a dark enclosure, or coordinates in space. In each instance, once the point of reference was established, the observer, at the given point of observation, could determine right and left, and without reliance on anything that could be called a whole. (Needham 1987: 25)

We are therefore certainly in agreement. Such is the process of the binary method, which considers a priori that each culture uses it in its representational space just as a modern Western traveller uses a map: the absence of transcendence (the reference is always ego-centred) and of the initial taking account of an orientation of value (left and right are only geometric sides). I maintain that it is wrong to think that this mode of representation is at work when Meru society assigns a 'left' magic to the Mugwe (or, what comes to the same thing, when it prohibits him from being, like others, more skilled with the right); when Nyamwezi society (a collection of kingdoms, placing 'society' on the plane of each kingdom) makes the king a bivalent being (on the plane of gender, numbers, colours etc.); when Samoan society separates and hierarchizes the 'sister–brother' difference and the 'man–woman' difference; in brief, every time that the anthropological gaze, falling on a global society, is confronted with relations and not with terms, and with hierarchies of relations, all this being a far cry from any idea of analogy between relations.

Therefore, even in the 'featureless desert', even in the narrow 'beam of a flashlight', the anthropological observer encounters facts like these: among the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea, the left hand (our term) is 'X' (specific term), but the right hand (our term) is 'the true hand'. This is no simple metaphor replacing the more everyday word for 'right'; it is the only, entirely everyday way of saying 'right hand'. And, of the left-hander, one says that 'his left hand is his true

hand'.[18] No 'map references' can help us, then. We must follow the way of 'truth', until we perceive that, in this society, among everything that exists, only certain things are 'true' (for example, the ceremonial object at the conclusion of an exchange), whereas other things are only what they are. The analysis then proceeds in terms of levels (value/empirical); it becomes holistic, and must leave the binary method. Let us note the fact without polemical intent.

18. I thank André Iteanu for having provided me with this example. To designate the other hand, the left of the right-hander or the right of a left-hander—if the case presents itself, which is rare—one returns to the general system of reference for all direction-finding, whose axes relate to the environment (towards the mountain, sea, etc.). For the 'truth' of Orokaiva exchanges, see under *be* in the glossary in Iteanu 1983.

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