Social Self–Organization and Self–Deconstruction

A tribute to Francisco Varela

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Abstract: The notions of autopoiesis and the like have enjoyed some fame in the social sciences, yet one thing is to apply them to the analysis of the social realm, a completely different thing is to reveal them in the traditional corpus of Western humanities. With regards to domains as different as Literary Theory, Religious and Social Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy and Psychosociology, we show that relevant ideas on the organization of the living, such as organizational closure, autonomy, endogenous fixed point, help us to better understand our age–old knowledge in social, economic, moral, and political philosophy. In particular, we will shed light on the only apparent paradoxical relation that links relevant social phenomena such as self–referentiality, self–externalization (or self–transcendence) and (self–)deconstruction.

Keywords: self–referentiality, hierarchy, supplement, carnival, fixed point.

Introduction

Francisco Varela was always reluctant to export his ideas on the organization of the living into the social domain. Others were rasher: Maturana, certainly, or German philosopher and sociologist Niklas Luhmann who built an entire sociological theory on the notion of *autopoiesis*. However, not only was Francisco more indulgent as regards my own work in social and political philosophy, but he actually collaborated in it. It is true that my method was not to *apply* the notions of organizational closure, autonomy and the like, to the social realm, but to *reveal*, in the age–old corpus of social, economic, moral, and political philosophy, similar ideas, models or concepts.

For instance, I was able to reconstruct Friedrich Hayek's social and economic philosophy in terms of organizational closure while bringing out

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at the same time both its strength, its strong internal consistency, and its weaknesses (Dupuy 1992; 1999). In terms of method: it is not a matter of smuggling into social theory ideas that originated in the domain of theoretical biology. It is a matter of disclosing and making more systematic and coherent principles of social organization that are embedded in extant social theories, thanks to the heuristics provided by the theory of autonomous systems. The Hayek case is especially easy, since Hayek himself was exposed early on to ideas stemming from cybernetics, the theories of self–organizing systems, and the like.

Here I will present a few illustrations of that method that I have selected because I worked them out through discussions with Francisco that spanned more than 25 years. I will take up in particular ideas that he and I developed in the framework of a conference that we jointly organized at Stanford in September of 1986: "Understanding Origin". I am very proud of the introduction that we wrote together (1992). Our goal was to compare from a formal point of view the structures of the narratives of origin that one finds in various scientific fields: the origin of the universe, of life, of meaning, of society, of human culture, and of money. We also invited the Deconstructionists, i.e. those people who contend that the question of origin should not be posed because it is meaningless. We wanted to confront them to those narratives of origins that one finds in science, precisely. They declined our invitation but as you will see their ideas were present nevertheless in our discussions.

Here is the list of the topics I will broach in turn.

a) Literary Theory: Self–referentiality in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*;
b) religious Anthropology: coexistence of rituals and prohibitions;
c) political Science: dictatorship;
d) sociology: Louis Dumont's concept of hierarchy;
e) philosophy: Jacques Derrida's Logic of the Supplement;
f) social Anthropology: Roberto da Matta's Analysis of Brazilian Carnival;
g) psychosociology: Freud's theory of the crowd.

Behind the apparent diversity of those fields and topics lies a common theme. The social order, based as it is on social norms, rules, and conventions, is mortal. Like everything belonging to the symbolic order, those rules and conventions are earmarked for decomposition and, ultimately, for destruction.

1. Literary Theory

Francisco was very fond of literature. He and I shared in particular a deep admiration for Jorge Luis Borges.

I am going to propose a French analysis of a British masterpiece, but first I would like to contrast it with what American (analytic) philosophy has to say on the subject. [Francisco didn't think much of analytic philosophy. He thought it was harmless, but just because it was vacuous].

In his seminal article "Truth in Fiction" (1978), David K. Lewis holds that the teller of a story (whether in the first or third person) and his readers operate under a tacit convention: the storyteller pretends « to be telling the truth about matters whereof he has knowledge ». The reader pretends to take him at his word. One can therefore define "truth in fiction" as follows: « In fiction f, Φ is true iff Φ is true at every possible world in [which] the fiction is told, but as known fact rather than fiction » (ivi: 39). In these worlds, the act of storytelling is truly what, in ours, « it falsely purports to be: truth–telling about matters whereof the teller has knowledge » (ivi: 40).

Lewis admits that there are exceptions, but he also admits that he does not know how to treat them. Example: when the storyteller pretends to lie — to lie, of course, relative to the convention of truth *in the fiction*. In that case, there is fiction in the fiction. « This iteration, in itself, is not a problem », affirms Lewis, but it does raise a question: « Why doesn't the iteration collapse? » What allows us to distinguish between pretending to pretend and really pretending? Lewis has « no solution to offer ». Any French literary person cannot help smiling at such candor and naïveté. Both Lewis' theory and its dilemmas represent the quintessence of what she has learned to criticize as the « referential illusion » of the realist conception of literature. What Lewis considers to be an exception is in fact the rule. A Lewis–type convention between storyteller and reader does exist, but literature is defined, not by respect for this rule, but by violation of it. As Borges, who inspired much of French literary theory, writes: « Literature is a game with tacit conventions. To violate them partially or totally is one of the many joys (one of the many obligations) of the game, whose limits are unknown ».

It seems to me that Ian McEwan, in his masterpiece novel, *Atonement*, has pushed the limits of the game even further than anyone has before him[1].

Here is how *Atonement* might be analyzed in the manner of French literary theorists such as Roland Barthes or Jean Ricardou. The analysis traces

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1. For a short but incisive summary of the plot, see Catherine Belling, NYU School of Medicine, http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/view/12003.

the reader's perceptions through three stages. In the first stage, the story is played out on two levels, real and fictive, without the readers knowing it yet because the two levels are skillfully undifferentiated. The fictive level occupies the first three parts of the novel: that is Briony's narrative as an attempt to expiate the harm she caused to Cecilia and Robbie. In this first stage, the storyteller — i.e. Briony, but also her hidden God, Ian McEwan himself — scrambles the signals. The second stage comes when we learn from the final twist that we the readers have been had — the realist reading, *à la Lewis*, carries the day: it was all a literary trick. Briony tried to find in fiction the way to atone for a sin caused by her fictional imagination. In this second stage, which is that of the *dénouement*, the storyteller confesses: « I lied ». What on the inside of the encompassing fiction we, the readers, took to be true was only fiction. We spontaneously carry out the cognitive operation defined by Lewis: the distinction between pretending to pretend and really pretending.

But then we arrive at the third stage: that of the rereading. We come to realize that everything we discovered about the fiction in the fiction — namely that what we took to be true was only fiction — applies in the same way to the encompassing fiction: what we took to be true was only fiction, and the fiction is the same in each case. As Ricardou writes, « in fiction, the real and the virtual have the same status because they are both governed entirely by the laws of the writing which institutes them » (1967: 32). The writing collapses pretending to pretend and really pretending.

In other words, we become aware of the convention *à la Lewis* between storyteller and reader through our experience of its violation. In this third stage, the storyteller says, « I am lying ». It is when the storyteller gives us to understand that he has fooled us, and thus pretends to tell us the truth (regarding his lie) — what we read was Briony's narrative, not Ian McEwan's — and here we must hail the incredible *tour de force* achieved by one of the most brilliant writers of our time: convincingly impersonating a bad one — that he in fact does fool us: what we read was all along McEwan's prose. And it is when he pretends to fool us, that he in fact tells us the truth. As Roland Barthes wrote, all literature is a « lie made manifest ». It can say, « *larvatus prodeo*: as I walk forward, I point out my mask ».

In talking to us about Briony's tragic engagement with fiction, McEwan's novel is really talking to us about itself, that is to say, about the magic of writing. As McEwan himself has said, « I sometimes feel that every sentence contains a ghostly commentary on its own processes » (McEwan&Roberts 2010: 107). The realist convention, *à la Lewis*, supposes that the fiction exists in a possible world, beyond language. The story merely develops or unfolds the fiction. For French literary theory, great literature is literature which tangles this hierarchy: « The sign of great stories is that the fiction they

propose is nothing other than the dramatization of their own functioning »
(Ricardou 1967: 178). The supposed signified is in fact the signifier of its
supposed signifier. We then discover a paradoxical figure, one that we can
decode as characterizing the *autonomy* — or, if you prefer, the organizational
closure — of literature, as defining its *meaning*.

In fact, this logical pattern conveys quite nicely the ambivalence of this
literary theory in regard to the question of social conventions. On the one
hand, the world of literature must be proclaimed purely conventional, in
the sense that it refers only to itself. But on the other hand, the whole point
is to shatter the sheep–like unanimity inherent in any convention. Hence
the magic formula: convention violates itself within itself.

2. Religious Anthropology

One might be tempted to dismiss the foregoing analysis and decide that we
are dealing here with a particularly decadent form of "postmodernism", of
the kind that the "foggy froggies" enjoy indecently.

But if we turn next to the anthropology of religion, we will soon run
into the same paradox — that « extraordinary paradox constituted in every
religious society by the juxtaposition of prohibitions and rituals » (Girard
1987: 21). Think of the ceremonies of sacred kingship or of rites of the
carnival type: the ritual consists in doing, in an often incredibly realistic
form, exactly what the prohibitions prohibit doing in everyday life: incest,
consumption of forbidden foods, acts of violence, etc. Here, too, everything
takes place as if the social rule included within itself — in the space and
time carefully delimited by the ritual — its own negation.

3. Political Science

The same logical pattern is familiar to the political scientist. It evokes irre-
sistibly in her mind the institutional device invented by the Romans under
the name of dictatorship. This name today evokes tyranny, absence of free-
dom, despotism, but it was not until the French Revolution and its Terror
that the word acquired such a bad reputation. For the Roman Republic,
whenever a crisis occurred, the Senate would put the laws of the city into
brackets, as it were, and entrust, for a limited amount of time, the task of
government to a dictator. In most modern democratic constitutions, we can
find the trace of that device under such names as "legal exception regime".
Imagine — no connection with any recent reality is intended — a powerful
democracy that has inscribed in its Constitution a clause entrusting full

powers to the President in case of a major crisis: the hierarchy of norms that prevails in ordinary times is inverted in times of crisis under the President's oversight. For instance, normally the rights of man override any utilitarian consideration, but in times of crisis, it becomes permissible to torture prisoners of war in order to extract vital information.

4. Sociology

The French anthropologist Louis Dumont was one of the major proponents of sociological holism, in opposition to the school of methodological individualism that is increasingly coming to dominate the social sciences. Holism has it that the social totality is always logically and ontologically prior to its constitutive parts. Dumont characterizes the relation between a whole and an element of that whole as being a hierarchical relation. But he uses the word « hierarchy » in a special sense which must not be confused with its meaning in the army, for example. It is not a linear relation of mere superiority, but instead a relation of « hierarchical opposition » between the encompassing (the whole) and the encompassed (the element). Dumont dubs this relation « the encompassing of the contrary » and shows that in holistic societies, like India, there is always a reversal of the hierarchy within the hierarchy. Take the Brahmin and the king, for instance: the Brahmin represents the sacred, the encompassing level, and is hierarchically superior to the king. But in certain domains to which the social hierarchy assigns an inferior rank, the hierarchy is reversed and the king stands above the Brahmin. As Dumont puts it, the Brahmin is above the king because it is only at inferior levels that the king is above the Brahmin.

Once again, we come across the same logical pattern, namely a hierarchy entangled within itself. Although Dumont calls this form "hierarchy" I prefer to use the term that Douglas Hofstadter coined in his wonderful *Gödel, Escher, Bach* to designate that very precise paradoxical form: tangled hierarchy (Hofstadter 1979).

It is important to note that for Dumont, this form is not paradoxical, precisely because of its hierarchical dimension. Therein lies an important difference with the literary theory I examined before, which claimed to collapse the rule and its reversal onto the same level, giving rise to the paradox. This difference is for Dumont what separates modern, desacralized society from religious societies.

5. Deconstructionist Philosophy

Suppose that everything that has been said so far has persuaded you that there is a profound, although enigmatic, relationship between the autonomy of a conventional order and the logical form of the convention that includes its own negation. If now you venture to enter the realm of continental philosophy you are in for a big surprise. You will run into the same abstract form but this time it receives the opposite interpretation: it is no longer a matter of characterizing the autonomy of a conventional order, but rather of demystifying and destroying any pretension to autonomy.

Indeed, exactly the same abstract form and the same terms « reversal of a hierarchical opposition » serve to describe what Jacques Derrida calls the logic of the supplement. That is an amazing fact because, if in Dumont this form characterizes the preeminence of a social totality always already there, for deconstruction it bears witness to the destruction of every totality, it seals the impossibility of conceiving or achieving any autonomous totality at all. This opposition has important political implications. Take the case of the traditional hierarchical relation between man and woman. For Dumont, the reversal of this hierarchy is part and parcel of the hierarchical relation, it is the sign of the totality, the unified whole constituted by the couple. As he puts it, « the mother of the family (an Indian family, for example), inferior though she may be made by her sex, in some respects nonetheless dominates the relationships within the family » (Dumont 1980: 241). For the Derridians, on the other hand, reversal of the hierarchy is a major deconstructionist task. From Dumont's viewpoint, it is equality which is the major threat to hierarchy; for the Derridians, as Jonathan Culler puts it, « it does not suffice to deny a hierarchical relation » in the name of equality, « it does little good simply to claim equality [. . .] for woman against man. [. . .] Affirmations of equality will not disrupt the hierarchy. Only if it includes an inversion or reversal does a deconstruction have a chance of dislocating the hierarchical structure » (Culler 1982: 166).

Deconstruction claims to destroy Western metaphysics, that is to say the pretention of the Logos to affirm itself as complete and self–sufficient, the ambition of philosophy to have immediate access to pure truth. It shows that all the philosophical texts that advertise this pretension in fact deconstruct themselves. The term of which they affirm the autonomy and the priority is exposed as having an irresistible need for a supposedly secondary and derivative term: their supplement.

Take the especially revealing example of philosophy and writing. Philosophy seeks to convince itself that it can communicate with truth directly, without the benefit of a mediator. It therefore can only devalue or deny

the medium by which it must nonetheless express itself: writing. Thus, philosophy strives to write: « This is not writing ».

But when philosophy (in the form of Plato's *Phaedrus*) seeks to say what is this self–authorized truth (or *aletheia*) to which it has access, it can do no better than to refer to the metaphor of writing: the kind of truth Socrates has in mind is, he says, « the sort that goes together with learning and is *written in the soul* of the learner » (Derrida 1981: 148). The object of banishment — writing — reveals itself as necessary to the constitution of the very *polis* that banishes it.

The logic of the supplement can be represented as assuming the same tangled hierarchy as the one between fiction and narration.

Let us consider now the hierarchical opposition between the literal and the figurative (or the metaphorical). Figures of speech and tropes have classically been considered to be deviations in relation to the proper or literal meaning. The inversion operated by deconstruction consists in seeing in the latter a metaphor whose metaphoric character has been lost from sight. The literal meaning is always already a trope, for metaphoricity is present from the start.

Now, if we consider writing — which Western metaphysics ranks second relative to Logos — we observe that this same metaphysics already operates on its own the very inversion of value that deconstruction sets out to accomplish. We already made this observation while discussing the hierarchical opposition between Logos (philosophy) and writing. *Literal* writing is reduced to the rank of a supplement, it makes up for the absence of a direct access to the truth *(aletheia)*. But if the *letter* of the text is thus downgraded, it is only the better to glorify the *spirit*. And direct access to the truth, as we saw, is expressed in Plato's text as *metaphorical* writing. *Aletheia* is « written in the soul » of the learner.

To sum up once more: in the realm of Logos, the literal is above the figurative; in the domain of writing, which is itself secondary in relation to Logos, the figurative is above the literal. That which at a superior level is superior becomes inferior at an inferior level. This configuration is precisely what Dumont characterizes as "hierarchy". Except that, for Dumont, it signifies the autonomy of a social totality always already there, while for Derrida, it characterizes the self–deconstruction of every pretension to autonomy.

What can we make of this paradox, namely that in two different and distant sectors of the humanities and the social sciences, the same logical pattern receives opposite meanings?

Our solution to this paradox has been to understand that there is still a third interpretation that allows us to dismiss the first two without pronouncing in favor of either. To repeat: in Dumont, tangled hierarchy characterizes

the autonomy of a self that is "always already" constituted; in Derrida, it is invoked to assert the impossibility of an autonomous self: but this same pattern occupies center stage in Francisco Varela's theory of autonomous systems, where it is interpreted as the form of the morphogenetic process by which an autonomous totality constitutes itself.

I would like to suggest a hypothesis that might help put a little order into all that I have said so far. Any conventional order, whether it be religious, modern or postmodern, *contains* its possible reversal, negation, violation, destruction. The verb "contains" should be construed in its twofold meaning: to contain is to have within oneself, but also to keep in check. Suppose one could demonstrate that the mechanisms of the constitution of a conventional order are the same as those of its decomposition. One would then apprehend the symmetrical blind–spots in the visions of Dumont and Derrida: Dumont sees only order, Derrida sees only the crisis that lurks beneath, with both of them missing the key point that order *contains* the crisis that undermines it.

6. Social Anthropology

My intention is to establish the following proposition:

> Deconstruction is the carnival of philosophy.

I will deal therefore with carnival, and more specifically with the Brazilian carnival. The occasion presents itself with the publication by anthropologist Roberto da Matta of a book devoted to the exploration of the paradoxes of a social order torn between tradition and modernity: the society of Brazil (da Matta 1978). If this book concerns us here, it is because the author sets out to organize his analysis around the opposition drawn by Dumont between the traditional societies which he calls "holistic" and "hierarchical", and the modern societies that are shaped by an economic ideology which Dumont characterizes as "individualistic" and "egalitarian". The problem confronted by da Matta is that he must account for three major dimensions of Brazilian social reality while his recourse to Dumont's theory provides him with only two categories of analysis. Carnival is the extra dimension.

Da Matta shows that a Brazilian's existence is comprised of three types of time. To start with, there is the temporality of daily life, which is exceedingly hierarchical, authoritarian, and inclined to moralizing (« each monkey on its branch », as the tropical saying goes). This type of time is the most basic of the three, and the other two temporalities oppose themselves to the first and represent, each in its own way, a negation of mundane

time. First of all, there are the times dedicated to ritual festivities, the most important one being carnival. Secondly, there exist those frequently unexpected moments when the lifestyle proper to every urban industrial society nullifies traditional prohibitions and obligations. In both of these cases there is a confusion of the differences instituted by the hierarchical order, yet this loss of differentiation occurs according to modalities that are wholly distinct from each other.

It may seem that da Matta has no problem in assigning the Dumontian category of hierarchy (or holism) to traditional Brazilian time, on the one hand, and the category of individualism to those instances when modernity destroys it, on the other. Yet there remains the problem of the third pole, for carnival seems to be compatible (or rather, incompatible) with both temporal modalities.

Carnival is like the staging of a play by the whole community, one enacting a process that involves the confusion and blurring of social differences. The social barriers which separate men in everyday life collapse. Everything dissolves: the social ties that strictly define a person's rights and obligations, the class and familial affiliations, the networks of influence and patronage, all collapse and give way to a ceremony in which socially integrated persons become independent and rootless individuals. It is these individuals that the carnival throws together, in a process that could easily be confused with the war of all against all imagined by Hobbes. Da Matta describes carnival as a *process of violent individualization*. Now — and this is where we stumble upon the paradox — da Matta also contends that carnival is one of those times when Brazilians feel the weight and the power of the social totality most profoundly: carnival is a ceremony in which everyone communes, melting together in a single crucible. It is as though all the celebrants wished to relinquish their individuality and to fuse with the carnivalistic crowd.

Paradoxically, a ritual that stages or mimics the community's conflictual dissolution appears to be an act of social collaboration. Or, to use Dumont's categories: during carnival, the height of holism and the height of individualism appear to coincide. In theory — this is the obvious truth which holist sociology keeps hammering home — the individual is always already social. As for individualist ideology, it is itself the product of a certain form of society which nonetheless remains fundamentally holist. Now, what the carnival shows is that if, unlike holist sociology, we interest ourselves in the *morphogenesis* of the social totality, thereby refusing to treat it as always already there, we find as one of its ingredients the disembodied individual of the state of nature. In Derridian terms: da Matta's text deconstructs itself — this self–deconstruction being the deconstruction of the Dumontian hierarchical opposition between society (holism) and the individual (individualism).

This analysis is too hasty, however. In effect, we should not forget that this entanglement of the hierarchical opposition between society and the individual occurs in the framework of a *ritual*. The threat constituted by its potentially disruptive effect is kept in check by the fact that it occurs within a space and time that are carefully marked off and circumscribed. In other words: the reversal of hierarchy takes place *within* hierarchy. This is the very paradigm of hierarchy in Dumont's sense. No wonder that progressive circles in Brazil consider that carnival serves the social order and the powers–that–be.

7. Psycho–Sociology

To proceed to an authentic deconstruction, we need to make a radical exit from the social and the ritual and to envisage the spontaneous, anti–or pre–social equivalent of carnival: panic (carnival being triply assimilable to a ritualized panic, in that it mimes panic, in that it is a festival of the totality and in that it is the celebration of Lupercus, of whom Pan is the Greek equivalent). Now, we find in one of Freud's later works, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* a paradox formally similar to that of carnival, but this time it concerns panic. It can be expressed as follows: the crowd never resembles itself so much as when it is decomposing (into panic) (Dupuy 1983).

Freud characterizes the crowd by two features:

a) its principle of cohesion: libido. The anti–social force *par excellence* is egoism or narcissism. For a collection of individuals to form a unity, a totality, a whole, this force must be conquered. « Such a limitation of narcissism », writes Freud, « can only be produced by one factor, a libidinal tie with other people. Love for oneself knows only one barrier — love for others, love for objects » (Freud 1955: 102).

b) the focal point of these libidinal ties, namely the person of the leader. Freud is mainly interested in what he calls « artificially » constructed crowds, whose prototypes are the army and the church. With Freud, the crowd is no longer the anarchic product of social decomposition; it is, on the contrary, thanks to its leader, the archetype of all durable social formations. The leader is the totalizing operator of the collectivity, its « fixed point ».

Now this topology is marked by a double singularity. The first is the figure of the leader. A Freudian analysis defines its paradoxical character in the following terms:

> Crowds are [...] composed of individuals who, in order to participate, have conquered their anti–social tendencies or sacrificed their self–love. And yet, in the middle of them stands a figure who is the only one in whom these tendencies are kept up, not to say exaggerated. [The masses] have renounced what the leader maintains intact and which becomes their centre of attention: precisely that self–love. [...] All leaders symbolize the paradox of the presence of an antisocial individual at the apex of society. (Moscovici 1981: 331)

Every attentive reader of Derrida will have recognized in this first paradox what the latter calls, in a celebrated text, the « aporia of the centered structure »:

> It has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality... the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure... is contradictorily coherent. (Derrida 1978: 279)

The second singularity is the paradox of panic. In panic, the crowd loses its leader, its fixed point. Panic, then, represents what deconstruction sets out to achieve: to deprive a centred structure of its centre. How do we conceive of what happens to a centred structure when it loses its centre?

According to Freud, when the leader vanishes and panic takes over, there is a powerful resurgence of narcissism, self–love and egoistic interests. The libidinal ties which assured the cohesiveness of the crowd are broken. It is impossible to doubt that panic means the disintegration of a crowd » and brings with it the « cessation » of all attachments among its members (Freud 1955: 97). And yet Freud acknowledges that, as indeed we all know, it is at precisely this moment, when everything that makes a crowd a crowd is gone — the leader, the libidinal bonds — it is at this very moment that the crowd most appears to us as a crowd. There seems to be a principle of identity as self–negation at work here, much in keeping with the guidelines of deconstruction.

Indeed, this paradox whereby a process of social totalization appears infinitely close to a process of social decomposition is not uncommon in the social sciences. It lies, for instance, at the heart of Durkheimian sociology. For Durkheim, as for Dumont, the social whole is transcendent in relation to its individual constituents. The problem is that Durkheim accounts for this transcendence in two opposite ways. First, by the fact that we are the products of our culture, institutions, language, etc.: they make us, we don't make them. Second, by the fact that in a group « in effervescence » — during carnival, for instance — the individual disappears and fuses with the crowd.

First the transcendence of the collective level is brought about by social order, then by social disorder and chaos.

If we could resolve this paradox, we might well be able to understand why the form that deconstruction takes — tangled hierarchy — is also the form assumed by the self–generating autonomy of the social order.

In conclusion, I should like to suggest how the two paradoxes in Freud's theory of the crowd (the paradox of the leader and the paradox of panic) might be resolved. It is a matter of considering the crowd, as well as its decomposition into panic, as an autonomous, self–organizing system. It will then appear that both the social whole and its destruction (or deconstruction) have the same logical form: tangled hierarchy. One has to envisage what I call the paradigm of the endogenous fixed point, produced by the crowd while the crowd imagines itself to be its product (such an entanglement of hierarchical levels is a distinctive feature of autonomous systems) (Dupuy 1983).

To understand the leader to be an endogenous fixed point is to see that he does not owe his central position to his intrinsic features (his supposed narcissism or charisma). The singularity of the leader is not a cause, it is an effect: a systemic effect. The leader conveys the impression that he loves himself, but this is only so because he desires what the others show him to be the desirable object *par excellence:* himself. His apparent self–love (self–reference) is an *indirect* self–love (self–reference); it has to be mediated through the eyes of the others. We have no narcissism here, only pseudo–narcissism.

To say that the leader is an endogenous fixed point is to claim that the human group takes as its external point of reference something that in fact comes from inside it, something that results from the composition of the interdependent actions of its members, through a mechanism of self–externalization. I submit that the same mechanism is at work in panic. Only from the artificialist or structuralist perspective of Freud is the crowd set in opposition to panic. In a systemic perspective, the decomposition (or deconstruction) of the crowd into panic raises no logical problem, since it is simply a matter of the substitution of one endogenous fixed point for another. Although the leader has disappeared in the panic, another fixed point representing the collectivity takes his place and appears to transcend the members. This fixed point is none other than the collective movement itself, which becomes detached, distances itself and takes on an autonomy in relation to individual movements, without ever ceasing, for all that, to be the mere composition of the latter. As Durkheim sensed so well, the social totality displays in such moments of "effervescence" all the qualities that men attribute to divinity: exteriority, transcendence, unpredictability, inaccessibility.

To sum up: tangled hierarchy is the form of self–externalization proper both *to* the self–constitution of the social order and *to* its spontaneous de-

composition or destruction. Dumont remains blind to that because, like the structuralists, he treats social totalities as always already constituted. Derrida does not see it because he does not grasp the fact that the mechanisms of destruction (or of deconstruction) are the same as those that are responsible for the emergence of social totalities.

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