

The View Held by the Other, the View Taken of the Other

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I hope I will not be accused of mental colonialism by attributing to Europe the role which belongs to it historically: that of the Self, which leaves the position of the Other for us. Consequently, this text ought to begin with the view *taken of* the Other (the European view of the Brazilians) and continue with the view *held by* the Other (the Brazilian view of the Europeans).¹

The European view of the Brazilians was distorted by two myths, both of European origin: that of the noble savage and that of the bad savage.

In Europe, its continent of origin, the prototype of the noble savage was the centaur Chiron, who looked after those who were ill and was also charged with the education of Achilles. In his human form, this savage lived close to nature and far from the corrupting influence of civilisation. The Scythians, Phrygians, and Thracians were noble savages, innocent peoples purer than the Athenians and the Romans. They were inhabitants of utopian countries, like the natives of the Fortunate Isles or the Hyperboreans. They were men of the Golden Age or those living at the dawn of humanity, who, according to Lucretius, were healthier and happier than their descendants. In the Middle Ages this was *homo sylvestris*, who, hairy and sensual, haunted the forests.

The prototype of the bad savage was Polyphemus, the cannibal Cyclops. Barbarians were always bad savages. The figure of the bad savage made its appearance each time the concept of progress, in material or moral terms, was at issue. During the Greek "Age of Enlightenment" (5th and 6th centuries BCE), the sophists spread beliefs concerning the usefulness of new techniques and the importance of submitting traditional ways and customs to critical examination which did not allow them to accept the idea of the superiority of primitive man. In the Middle Ages, certainty that the New Testament represented progress when compared to the Old Law caused several Christian thinkers to challenge the possibility that men before the Revelation could have been virtuous.

At the time of the discovery of Brazil, the Europeans met as many noble savages as bad savages, without being aware that these two figures were part of an imaginary European world which predated by far Columbus and Cabral.

The noble savage was found in Brazil by Caminha, for whom the Indians were "good people, of pleasing simplicity", gentle and peace-loving, and living in a state of innocence devoid of all covetousness. This was confirmed by Vespucci, who spoke of the "goodness and very innocent nature" of the Brazilian tribes. The Capuchin André Thévet in turn confirmed that the Indians were brave, hospitable and stoic in the face of adversity. The Calvinist Jean de Léry added his voice, invoking Psalm 120 with a hymn of praise to the

virtue of the Indians and the bountiful nature of the country: "Blessed are the people who live there."

Similarly, Europeans will have no difficulty in discovering in Brazil the familiar figure of the bad savage. From the beginning there have been legends of cruel or monstrous beings who lived in Brazil, such as men without heads, men with the head of a dog, men with their feet back to front, and men who lived at the bottom of the rivers and dragged people into the abyss. But it was the indigenous peoples above all who were the incarnation of the bad savage. Their malevolent nature had to be emphasised by the colonists in order to justify slavery, and by the Jesuits in order to validate the catechism. According to Father Manuel de Nobrega, the Indians "are dogs in the way in which they eat each other and kill each other, and pigs in their vices and in the way they treat each other". Father José de Anchieta went further: "for people like this there is no better sermon than the sword and the iron bar, the *compelle eos intrare* being more necessary here than anywhere else." The cannibalism of the Indians, their perverted sexual practices, and the sorcery of their healers all showed that they were under the dominion of Satan.

These two mythical figures, invented by Europe and rediscovered in Brazil, were to play a decisive role in European thought.

The noble Brazilian savage reappeared in France, in Montaigne's *Essais (Essays)*. For him there was nothing barbarous in the Indian nations. They were simply subject to the law of nature as it was imagined by the philosophers of antiquity. They had no kind of trade at all, no knowledge of writing, no science of numbers, no higher education, no political hierarchy, no way of indicating subordination, wealth, or poverty, no contracts, no inheritance, no occupation which was not idle, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use for wine or wheat. They had no nouns to indicate lying, betrayal, dissimulation, avarice, envy, malicious gossip, or forgiveness. These happy people had only minimal needs and no concept of private property; as a result, fathers left to their heirs the undivided possession of all their goods, with no other claim than that resulting from nature, at the moment of their birth.

Europeans found some of their practices scandalous, but without reason. This was the case with cannibalism. The Indians did not practice cannibalism in order to feed themselves, but for vengeance, in the same way that the Scythians did. From this point of view they were more human than the Europeans, who were also cannibals in their own way, but guided by fanaticism, as the wars of religion have shown. There was more barbarity in eating a man alive than there was in eating one dead, in torturing a body by dismembering it while it was still capable of feeling and cooking it over a slow fire, as though it were being gnawed at by dogs and pigs, than cooking and eating him once he was dead. War in this country was noble and generous, as much as that was possible for this malady of humanity; its sole foundation was glory, *virtus* in its ancient sense. Prisoners had indomitable courage and scorned death, in the same way as stoics did, and defied to the end the enemies who were going to slaughter them, saying that they had already eaten the relatives of those who were now going to eat them. This flesh, these muscles and veins, said these enemies, are yours, poor fools that you are; do you not realise that the substance of your ancestors' limbs still survives? Take the time to savour us and you will find there the taste of your own flesh. In the same way, polygamy filled Europeans with consternation. Why? Only the bravest warriors had the right to own a large number of wives and it was their wives themselves, jealous of the reputation of their husbands, who

took it upon themselves to find them new concubines. Besides, the Bible is full of instances in which wives, such as Leah, Rachel, and Sarah, put their maidservants at the disposition of their husbands. Equally well-known is Livy's habit of providing women for Augustus.

On the whole, French institutions were more barbaric than those of the savages. The indigenous peoples, said Montaigne, could be described as barbarians compared with the laws of reason, but not in comparison with us, who far outstripped them in all forms of barbarity. If this was so, the French did not have the right to judge the Indians, though the Indians were well placed to judge the French. Which is exactly what three *Tupinambas* did when they were taken to Rouen in 1562, where they were able to talk with the young King Charles IX. Asked what had seemed most remarkable to them in the country, they cited two things. The first was their astonishment that so many men at the height of their physical powers obeyed a child instead of electing a king from amongst themselves. And secondly, having observed that French society was divided into very wealthy men and beggars, they could not understand why the latter did not behead the former and burn down their palaces. Later Montaigne asked one of the cannibals, a *cacique*, what advantage his position as chief brought him. The chief replied that his privilege was to be the first to go into battle. Then Montaigne asked how many men the chief had under his command. The reply was made by indicating, by means of a gesture, the space which could hold them: some 4000 to 5000 men. Finally the philosopher inquired about the royal prerogatives in time of peace: these were reduced to the dependent villages being obliged to cut paths in the forest to allow the chief to travel around.

In short, in a few words the Indians of Brazil demolished the political regime in France, based on hereditary monarchy; its social organisation, based on class division and the system of privileges; its religious policies, based on intolerance and the right assumed by the king to impose a state religion by means of fire and the sword; its foreign policy, in which war was no longer waged in pursuit of honour but for the conquest of provinces, territories, and material goods; and, finally, private morality, based on monogamy and the conjugal bond. Not bad work for simple savages! Montaigne thought so, too, adding "And they don't even wear breeches!"

We know that Rousseau based the elaboration of his thesis that man is naturally good mainly on Montaigne. But in the eighteenth century the noble savage changed nationality. Voltaire made him a North American Indian, and Diderot a Polynesian. In these different guises, the noble savage was used to criticise European institutions by contributing in this sense to the demolition of the Bastille.

In the nineteenth century, the noble savage became North American again thanks to Chateaubriand, whilst in the twentieth century he became Brazilian once more thanks to Lévi-Strauss. This was inevitable, since the French anthropologist had subordinated his ethnography to Rousseau, who had read Montaigne. In the meanwhile, the natural goodness of the Brazilian savage was no longer embodied by the *Tupinambas*, but by the *Nambikwaras*. In them could be found, according to Lévi-Strauss, tremendous gentleness, profound carefreeness, and a naïve and charming animal satisfaction.

The bad savage also had a role to play in Europe. What the Barbarians were for the Greeks, and the Tartars and the Vikings for the people of the Middle Ages, the cannibals of America were, in part, for the Europeans: a menacing otherness and the brooding presence of evil.

The bad savage contributed to the redefinition of the practice of witchcraft. European witches were as devilish as the old Indian women who took part in the cannibalistic feasts illustrated in books about voyages to Brazil.

He also played an important role in one of the first political theories of the modern era, that of Hobbes. The state of nature, the place where everyone fights mercilessly against everyone else, and from which man is saved by Leviathan, was constructed on the model of Amerindian societies, composed of bad savages who made human life "nasty, brutish, and short".

In the eighteenth century the bad savage competed with his virtuous brother. The terrible "troglodytes" described by Montesquieu in his *Lettres Persanes* were bad savages. Those who supported the thesis which disparaged primitive people and saw them as wild beasts, crude and often cannibalistic, were dubbed the *ferini*. Voltaire was ranked amongst the *ferini*. His satirical decasyllabic poem, *Le mondain*, sang the praises of the luxury and elegance of modern man and said that the primitive people had "long nails, rather black and grimy, and rather dishevelled hair". In his *Laocoon*, Lessing mocked the snub noses and the thick lips of the Hottentot women. Besides, primitivism had to be contested in the century which reinvented with Turgot the notion of progress: if everything is moving forward, it is impossible to consider primitive man as superior to modern man.

In the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the bad savage led to the articulation of European imperialistic ideology. As Kipling said, he was a perverted native, "half demon, half child", who needed to be under the direction of the white man.

Today, the bad savages are still within Europe. They are the migrant workers, the bad Turk and the bad Vietnamese, whose "primitive" values and "barbaric" customs threaten the cultural integrity of the countries which take them in.

Returning to the relationship between Europe and Brazil, we see that the figures of the noble savage and the bad savage have now spread even wider and include Brazilians in general and not just the indigenous people.

What the Europeans had been saying about the noble Indian ever since Montaigne, is now said about Brazilians: they are a warm-hearted people, full of imagination and human warmth, in contrast to the narrow rationalism of the Europeans.

But from another point of view, the Brazilians are also the bad savages: lazy and corrupt, they murder street children and set fire to forests.

Let us move on now to the second subject in our dialectic, the "view held by the Other".

We know from the first chroniclers that the Indians saw the Portuguese as gods or demi-gods. Later, these envoys from the heavens showed passions which were rather less than divine, such as a thirst for gold and cruelty, which led the Indians to demonise the whites. These two opposing attitudes are the origin of the two views which the Brazilians have today of Europeans and North Americans. A positive attitude is part of the myth of the noble civilized person, and the negative attitude is part of the myth of the bad civilized person.

The myth of the noble civilized person prevailed during most of the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth century. It took the form of unconditional Euro-centrism or, to be more exact, incorrigible Francophilia. Everything came to us from Paris, from light

comedy to the treaty on constitutional law. France taught us to see, feel, and think. Victor Hugo was our idol in the nineteenth century, Anatole France at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the Dreyfus affair, the whole of Brazil became *dreyfusard* and supported Dreyfus: it was another way of paying homage to France, a fair, noble country where right would triumph in the end. Throughout the First Republic, 14 July was a national holiday in Brazil.

The myth of the bad civilised person appeared on the horizon at the beginning of the modernist movement. The aim of this movement was to rediscover national roots, and break with the mental dependence which subordinated us to the large European centres. Referring to the role of the Indian in forming the ideology of the noble savage, Oswald de Andrade said that, without the Brazilians, the Europeans would not even have possessed their "miserable declaration of the rights of man". In opposition to European patriarchy, modernists set up a "matriarchy of Pindorama", the indigenous name for Brazil.

It must be recognized that the two views together produced one cross-eyed view, deformed and partial. The issue was not reciprocal knowledge, but refusal of recognition, of ignorance.

The Europeans looked at the Indians, and instead of seeing people of flesh and bones, they saw only the two mythical figures, the noble savage and the bad savage, both of them of European origin.

The noble savage was allegorical, in the etymological sense of the word: saying one thing in order to indicate another. This other thing was Europe. Thévet glorified the Brazilian savages in order to vilify the Protestants, Léry in order to slander the Catholics. Montaigne defended the cannibalism of the Indians in order to criticise the horrors of the wars of religion. In general, it could be said that the portrait which he painted of the indigenous peoples corresponded to an aristocratic caste with which the author of the *Essais* identified and which was in the process of being marginalized by the rise of an absolute monarchy. The warlike virtue which he attributed to the *Tupinambas*, the absence of a mercenary motive in war, the problem of preserving honour which showed itself in the vindictive character of the indigenous peoples, the general contempt for material goods, all this corresponded to an image invented for itself by a nobility which felt threatened. In the eighteenth century, the myth of the noble savage continued to focus on Europe, but this time in the interests of another class, the bourgeoisie. The issue involved was no longer the ideological transformation of a class in decline by returning to a Golden Age located in the past, but preparation of the way for the construction of a new society. The Huron and the Tahitian no longer represented ancient man, but modern man. The state of nature was no longer a brake, but was taking the lead as a regulating idea and a revolutionary utopia. Lahonton's Huron was a deist and a revolutionary, Voltaire's Huron a deist and a reformist, and Diderot's Tahitian a materialist and a utilitarian. In the nineteenth century Eurocentrism continued, but the content was different. Whilst the noble savage of the Renaissance was the incarnation of an aristocratic reaction against growing absolutism, and the noble savage of the Enlightenment was the incarnation of an anti-feudal utopia with a bourgeois character, Chateaubriand's Romantic noble savage represented the restorative counter-utopia directed against the Enlightenment, in which the converted Indian illustrated the victory of sensitivity over the reason of the philosophers, and the victory of Christianity over the deism of the philosophers. The return of the noble savage in the twentieth century did not change the Eurocentric perspective.

Lévi-Strauss, the most universalist of the anthropologists, let it be clearly understood that the latest aim of comparative ethnography was to discover general principles which could be applied to the reform of European customs themselves.

The noble savage did not just express a Eurocentric attitude, but also an egocentric one. These authors were not just unable to distance themselves from their culture and social class, but also from themselves. Even in the prologue of the *Essais*, Montaigne had said that he himself was the subject of the book: "it is me that I am painting". Who is this "me"? The reply comes a few lines later. If he were to be found among the nations which were apparently still living in the sweet freedom of the first laws of nature, he assured us, he would paint himself completely naked. This "completely naked" man would resemble the Brazilian savage like a brother, in whose perspective Montaigne appeared to place himself, apparently with the intention of looking at his own society from the outside. But was it really the savage who took the place of the "me"? All indications are to the contrary: it was the "me" that used the savage as a megaphone. The same can be said about Rousseau. He was the eternally banished man, the exile in his own culture. He cut himself off from others like him: he became a savage. He voluntarily put himself in a state of nature, an antisocial state in which isolated men lived. He was a savage because he renounced the city, and a man of nature because he was solitary. He was good, he thought of nothing but the good of man, in spite of all the persecution he suffered, thus denying the claim of his enemies who defamed him by saying that solitary men were "malicious". All in all, Rousseau's noble savage appeared to be principally a projection of his own Self.

In the same way the bad savage was an ethnocentric fantasy. His function was to justify European expansionism and colonialism, in the same way that the function of the noble savage was to criticize the institutions of Europe. If the savage was bad, Europe had the right to dominate him; if he was good, it was Europe which was bad and needed to be transformed.

Both instances involved a journey from the same to the same, and not towards the Other. It was a totally narcissistic structure. In the myth of the noble savage, the European attributed to the Other all the perfections which he would have liked to have but which he did not find in himself. In the myth of the bad savage, he projected on to the Other all the undesirable qualities which he could not accept in himself. The Other was always deformed, either by being enhanced, or by being belittled.

Proof that the dichotomy did not correspond to an objective desire to get to know "exotic" cultures, but was an intrinsic necessity for European thought, is that this duality had been applied even within Europe itself.

The noble savage was discovered in individuals and groups which, by their gentleness, simplicity, and courage could play the critical role reserved until then for the inhabitants of forests overseas. Wild children, such as the one who appeared in François Truffaut's film, were known about in the eighteenth century. Found in a wood in France, this young boy was the object of an experiment in resocialization using Rousseau's pedagogical principles. Romanticism invented the noble peasant, as in the novels of George Sand and the paintings of Millet, and the noble proletarian, such as Fantine and Cosette in *Les Misérables* and the *grisettes*, the working-class women of Balzac and Henri Murger. In the twentieth century, Foucault and antipsychiatry created the figure of the noble madman, subjected to segregation by official decree.

The bad savage made his appearance in the frightening image of the "dangerous classes", the proletarians who threatened order and bourgeois civilization. These were the cannibals within our own borders. Dumas talked about "Mohicans of Paris", and criminals were called "Apaches".

But the savage was not just external. When the European looked within, he found him again inside the mental system of civilized man and, in doing so, he invented psychoanalysis. Freud developed a kind of ethnography of the spirit and thought of modern man as a continuation of the primitive. During the psychogenetic development which he posited, all men passed through a cannibal or oral stage. This cannibalism resembled anthropophagy in as much as primitive peoples "believe that ingestion of parts of the body by eating them also confers on them the properties which belonged to that person". It was the reproduction, in each individual, of the totemic banquet, in which brothers of the primitive horde devoured the father, "actualizing their identification with him, with each one taking on a share of his strength". Oedipus's excess was brought about mainly by identification with the father, in a process which reproduced this phylogenetic crime individually. All in all, the psychic life of civilized man remains subject to determining factors which stem from the wild state of man. The savage remains within civilized man.

Diderot had already described the antagonistic co-existence of the savage and the civilized man within man. Do you want a brief history of all our wretchedness? he asked. Here it is. Once upon a time man was innocent; then a complicated and calculating side was introduced into him. This sparked off uninterrupted war in the cave, lasting throughout life.

There was already a Freudian conflict between mental authorities, between reason and impulse. The subconscious was "a foreign interior territory" according to Freud's theory. This territory was equivalent to the exotic lands which the first explorers went to look for at the edges of the universe. The internal exotic country was inhabited by noble savages and bad savages, just like the external one. The bad savage was the guilty, parricidal, incestuous subconscious, the cauldron of the witches of the id, and its descendant, the superego, a sadistic authority, "the pure culture of Thanatos". But a noble subconscious also existed. This was the lovable, free and innocent subconscious, oriented towards the pleasures of love, which produced beautiful dreams and ingenious verbal puns, unjustly repressed by censorship. The noble subconscious was sensuality without sin and wisdom without books, like Montaigne's *Tupinambas*.

As for the Brazilian view of Europeans, this was a little like a distortion of a distortion. The myths of the noble and the bad civilized person had a character which was to a large extent reactive. These were local responses to European myths of the noble savage and the bad savage. We introjected the figure of the noble savage and identified with it. Consequently, we felt morally superior to the Europeans, which reinforced the stereotype of the bad civilized person. On the other hand, at other times, we introjected the figure of the bad savage and felt inferior to the Europeans, which reinforced the stereotype of the good civilized person. We adopted these myths and viewed Europeans according to these imaginary identities. The European view, which had falsified the image of the indigenous peoples, produced an opposite view, which gave a false picture of the European. It was, so to speak, second degree narcissism. In both cases, the Other was always imaginary, a narcissistic duplication of the ego. The subject always saw himself when he thought of

the Other. But this distorted Other produced by the indigenous people was more fantastical, because its ego had itself been produced by a foreign view.

These optical illusions have disappeared in our time. But with the loss of importance of nation states and the increase in infra- and supranational identities, the games of mirrors have been moved to other spheres: sex, race, ethnic group, culture, and religion.

All these identities are composed of two poles, which recreate the dialectic of the view taken of the Other and the view held by the Other on two levels: one benevolent and the other hostile, strengthening the pattern of the noble savage and the bad savage. For example, in the relationship between the sexes, the masculine view looks on his Other, the woman, either with benevolence, as an intuitive, affectionate, and altruistic being (the definition of the noble savage), or with malevolence, as an irrational, capricious, and cruel being (characteristics of the bad savage). The view held by the Other corresponds to the view taken of the Other. Historically, woman has accepted being this difference defined by man. Starting from this difference, she created masculine identity: man was a being endowed with all the attributes which she did not recognize in herself. In a traditional version, acceptance of the difference led to an attitude of submission: yes, we are that difference, and all that is left for us is to be sublime and heroic. In a more contemporary version, the difference is transformed into a campaign banner: yes, we are that difference, and it is as a result of this that we are going to articulate our resistance to sexist oppression, and not in the name of abstract equality of the sexes. Something similar occurs in the relationship between blacks and whites, and between anti-Semites and Jews, and was studied by Sartre, who built up the prototype of the construction of the Other from a hostile view. In all these examples the same pattern is confirmed, which is the basis for the imaginary construction of the Other.

All this means that the two views do not meet. But without this interaction, the view and the vision cannot coincide. The Self looks at the Other and does not see it, because an ideological obstacle is placed between them. The Other looks at the Self and does not see it because it has assimilated the same ideology. The two views are vertical and asymmetrical. The vertical view of the Self is dominant. The vertical view of the Other is subordinate. The two are reificatory. The Self looks down and constructs the inferiority of the Other as an antihistoric essence. The Other looks up and constructs the hegemony of the Self as an equally antihistoric essence. Even when the difference is used in a perspective of emancipation, the picture hardly changes. The oppressed continues to move in the same differential space provided by the oppressor. They remain prisoners of a vertical, reificatory, and essentialist vision. To counter the vertical view by which my aggressor locks me in an identity which I did not want, by another vertical view, as a result of which I invent for my tyrant an identity which does not correspond with the one he has made for himself, is the same as going round in circles in a territory chosen by my adversary.

We need a different model to move from the field of the vertical, asymmetrical view to that of the horizontal, symmetrical, and reciprocal view. But that does not mean going to the extreme of moving from the paradigm of subjectivity to that of intersubjectivity. The subjective, monologic view is incompetent and unable to see either the Other of the subject, or the subject itself. Only the intersubjective view resulting from the free and egalitarian interaction between the different participants in the process of communication can offer access to a true vision. I can only see the Other if I can see myself, but I can only

see myself when I am seen by the Other. The labyrinth of views is necessary for us to be able to imagine the objectivity of vision. Perspective is inseparable from ethics. The view with which I see the Other ought to receive in response the view with which the Other sees me. The intersubjective view is anti-essentialist, because the qualities I attribute to the Other are always relational, historical, and modifiable, and not the properties which are immanent in it. Hermeneutic understanding of any social reality presupposes the interaction of views. Black and white, male and female, national and foreigner, are relative terms which are defined reciprocally, symmetrically, and without hierarchy. Each individual pole becomes completely intelligible as a result of its relationship with the other. The Christian needs an Islamic view if he wants to understand Christianity. Understanding is always mediated by mutual understanding. This is valid individually, because an autarchic Self is not capable of either apprenticeship or self-transparency. It is also valid socially, because a people and a culture are not timeless essences, but terms which are determined differentially, each in relation to the other, in perpetual reconstruction and dialectic interaction.

Coming out of oneself is a necessary stage in the long journey which leads to understanding oneself. In the course of five centuries, this goal has only rarely been achieved by the Europeans and the Brazilians. Nor has it been achieved by the new social movements, oriented on the categories of type and culture. In every case, the principal obstacle has been the difficulty of shifting from the centre, of confronting the risk of an "interocularity". Without this, we shall have neither a view held by the other nor a view taken of the other, because every *alter* will always be an *alter ego*.

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(Translated from the (Brazilian) Portuguese into French by Daniel Arapu)

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Note

1. The Conference *Mirada del otro, mirada sobre el otro* was held at the 25th General Assembly of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences which took place in Buenos Aires between 25 September and 2 October 2000, that is in the same year as the commemoration in Brazil of the quincentennial of the discovery of their country by the Portuguese. This was a happy coincidence for a Brazilian guest like me, allowing an examination of the two subjects which formed the theme of the Conference, from the very beginnings of the history of Brazil: the view held by the Other and the view taken of the Other. The text which follows opened the Conference. The articles by N. Jitrik and N. Rosa were also given at the Conference. See also "*Brésil, cinq cents ans de métissage*" (*Brazil, five hundred years of racial integration*), *Diogenes*, no. 191, (48:3) Autumn 2000, Paris, PUF (special issue).