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On Foreigners and
the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, and the French Revolution as well, has spawned a wealth of ideas about such concepts as nation and foreigners, mankind and the masses; these have become more and more complex, for we are still living with that inheritance—its dignity, its contradictions, its tolerance, and its pitfalls—and can project our present sensitivities onto them. As we pick out just a few of those aspects that are inherent in what I shall, to simplify matters, call the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, let us think of how these fragments appeal to our contemporaries when facing the perplexing question that still seems utopian: is a society without foreigners possible?

Beginning with Montesquieu's neo-stoicism and including Diderot's pantomime of human strangeness or the cynicism of cosmopolitans rebelling against all sacred values, the eighteenth century was to hand down to the Revolution an ideology of human equality that, from the "rights of man" to the "rights of the citizen," proved hard to manage when facing the onslaughts of political passions, war, and the Terror.

Montesquieu: The Fully Political and the Private Sector

Without dodging the problem of our antagonisms but in opposition to Hobbes who posited a state of war inherent in nature and in human society, Montesquieu (1689–1755) affirmed the notion of *human sociability* at the outset of *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). More timorous than malevolent, human beings would nevertheless join together naturally, and their political constructs could hardly be the art of “building iniquity into a system” but on the contrary would succeed in working out a “moderate form of government.” Such a sociability has forerunners with Cartesianism (the jurist Jean Domat), Christian theology (Fénelon), English neo-stoicism and empiricism (most particularly with Locke and Shaftesbury). It found its anchoring in the economic history of the eighteenth century, which Montesquieu attentively scrutinized and described as a period of increasing wealth, of unprecedented expansion of trade, and of an economic and political liberalism that, in his eyes, would insure the possibility of social peace. Whether it be Christian charity, or the ideal of the whole of mankind achieving the satisfaction of all, or the liberal trade economy of the time—there are numerous, heterogeneous factors that, with Montesquieu, come together and enable *The Spirit of the Laws* to be founded on such an intrinsic sociability, which government policies should both make explicit and guarantee. One can argue as to whether such a position leads to conservatism or on the contrary to social dynamism, whether it is purely sociological, adumbrating the stance of modern social sciences, or necessarily philosophical, laden down with the writer’s masonic humanism.¹ I shall, for my purpose, extract from the still not too apparent complexity of Montesquieu’s thought his concern for *totality* and one of its major consequences—his *cosmopolitanism*.

A totality encompassing *nature* and *culture* (“climate” and “customs,” for instance); *men* and *institutions*; *laws* and *mores*; the *particular* and the *universal*; *philosophy* and *history*. These

are multiple series among which *mediations* are at work, the latter being able at the same time to insure the tempering of institutions and that of human beings; the latter, if they are thus fully political, embody a large number of political determinants that are brought to the level of ideality. Ernst Cassirer wrote, “One can say of Montesquieu that he is the first thinker to grasp and to express clearly the concept of ‘ideal types’ in history.”

Indeed, “On Laws and the Relationship they Have with the Principles that Shape the General Spirit, the Customs, and the Manners of a Nation” is the title of the fundamental nineteenth Book of *The Spirit of the Laws*. Here an *ideality* has been posited (the “general spirit”), of which the stoic and Christian, natural and “liberal” genealogy has been pointed out, and which is a fundamental prospect of Montesquieu’s political thought. It at once endows it with its moral essence (as Kant clarified this notion in his conception of what he saw as the indissoluble pair constituted by the “political” and the “ethical”) in that, beyond climatic determinations, for instance, it emphasizes a *contingency* in which both the course and the fatality of history are carried out, and in which the exercise of political freedom is precisely located.

This *fully social*, which is also considered here on the level of the nation, nevertheless reaches its climax when Montesquieu’s thought tackles the *totality of the species*. His thinking is then weighed down with fatalistic determinism (particularly climatic) and conceives the political fabric of the globe on the basis of the *sociability* and “general spirit” that govern the human species finally restored to its actual universality through the modern expansion of trade. The nation’s burden, so often acknowledged, is then transposed in order to be absorbed at the heart of a *borderless* political philosophy dominated by the concern for politics understood as the maximal integration of mankind in a moderate, attainable ideality.

Traces of it may be found in the less technical text of his *Thoughts*. To be sure, Montesquieu asserted, “I love only my

homeland."² But also: "When I traveled in foreign countries, I became attached to them as to my own; I shared in their lot, and I should have liked them to be in a flourishing state."³ His political reflections, national as they may be, were not nationalistic: the good State was conceived for others, for all. Moreover, he noticed that national feelings have waned in the course of history.⁴ Finally, there is the famous statement: "If I knew something useful to myself and detrimental to my family, I would reject it from my mind. If I knew something useful to my family but not to my homeland, I would try to forget it. If I knew something useful to my homeland and detrimental to Europe, or else useful to Europe and detrimental to Mankind, I would consider it a crime."⁵

Mankind, thus united by the ethic will of the political thinker becomes nevertheless *historically* specified as an international society made possible by the development of trade, dominated by Europe, and dependent on a moderate regulation of the flow of goods and currency. "Now that the universe nearly constitutes only one nation, that each knows that of which it has too much and that which it lacks, and tries to acquire the means to receive it, gold and silver are extracted everywhere from the earth, those metals are transported everywhere, every nation obtains them and there is not a single nation whose gold and silver capital does not increase every year, although more promptly and more abundantly with some than with others."⁶

We should note this observation, astonishing for its modern tone: "Europe is no more than a Nation made up of several others, France and England need the richness of Poland and Muscovy as one of their Provinces needs the others; and the State that thinks it increases its power through the downfall of its neighbor, usually weakens along with it."⁷

Such a universalizing argument, which, as I pointed out, is based on reflections related to a nation's economic and social policies, both foreign and domestic, surprisingly leads to a pre-

mature warning (which foreshadows Hannah Arendt's position against distinguishing the "rights of man" from the "rights of the citizen"; for it is indeed true that with Montesquieu any political policy, in the full sense of the term, is implicitly a cosmopolity because it includes the totality of human beings, the "general spirit": "All particular duties cease when they cannot be accomplished without offending human duties. Should one consider, for instance, the good of the homeland when that of mankind is at stake? No, *the duty of the citizen is a crime when it leads one to forget the duty of man*. As it was impossible to place the universe within the same society, this has caused men to be foreigners to some, but such a division did not stipulate against primary duties, and man, everywhere a creature of reason, is neither a Roman nor a Barbarian."⁸

Montesquieu's cosmopolitanism was more than the outgrowth of a naturalistic rationalism that might have been derived from the stoics. That pattern undoubtedly followed the outlines of an epistemological process that was specific to Montesquieu himself. In that sense, *cosmopolitanism* would be the metaphor of *political thought itself* when it has succeeded in dialecticizing the highest determination of the human within its own concept, and when it unfolds, ruled by a need for periodic homeostasis rather than for stability. Nevertheless, concurrently with the birth of modern political thought, a historical necessity has taken shape, which the nationalism of the two centuries that followed Montesquieu's time has bypassed, but whose urgency, for us, he has heralded. If *The Spirit of the Laws* is to remain faithful to the fundamental sociability and the moderatable ideality that the distinguished political thinker had presupposed, nation-states must give way to higher political systems.

Now, assuming that such a cosmopolity is the expression of the associative and integrative spirit that governs Montesquieu's political thought, it goes hand in glove—need this be restated?—with setting up a safety network that should prevent the brutal

integration of difference (and, to begin with, that of the *social* and the *political*) into a totalizing, univocal set that would eliminate any possibility of freedom.

The separation of powers, the preservation of a constitutional monarchy whose possible excesses would constantly be checked by a reasonable judiciary, the very belief in a social peace based on the freedom of individuals and obtained by upholding the dichotomy between the social and the political that is represented by the organic enactment of power in the royal figure—those are the strong features of Montesquieu's thought, which resurfaced in the liberal, post-revolutionary conservatism of Benjamin Constant or Alexis de Tocqueville; they constitute the safety network I just referred to and should be pondered in the light of his cosmopolity.

Not that they should be taken up again as they were; rather, they should induce us to think that, within the judiciary that would insure the *rights of men* for all, beyond the *rights of citizens*, the obliteration of the very notion of "foreigner" should paradoxically encourage one to guarantee a long life to the notion of . . . "strangeness." It is from such a viewpoint that it is essential to respect what is *private*, or even *secret*, within a fully social domain that would not be homogeneous but preserved as a union of singularities. The singular should not be confined only to the figure of the monarch, who might be tempted—a rationalist vertigo—to embody perfect legality, but above all in the "weakness" and "shyness"⁹ of his subjects, who are subject to cosmopolitical laws only when their rights to concord are recognized on the basis of their singularities, which cannot in themselves be harmonized. Beside the *political* and the *social*, there would then emerge, in a dignity that cannot lawfully be bypassed, the *private* domain (matters recently brought up in ethical debates concerning genetics are no more than its contemporary extension). At the same time, the level of political power, already curbed by the judiciary but more and more removed from its sacred pedestal by

the impact of economics and the technical requirements of its administration, would find itself scaled down in its intrinsic use and distributed between the *social* and the *private* sectors. That implies not only that "heroes" and "great leaders" in politics are vanishing, as deplored today by disgruntled and sacramental people, but, above all, that there is a new concept of politics, understood as an attempt to harmonize what is irreducible through an interplay of diversified systems and stratum (political, social, private). Let us not forget that Montesquieu's cosmopolitanism was the consequence of his fundamental concern to turn politics into a space of possible freedom. His "modernism" is to be understood as a rejection of unified society for the sake of a coordinated diversity.

The Foreigner: The Alter Ego of the Philosopher

Within that frame of mind, the image of the "good savage" that had already been coined by the Renaissance underwent a metamorphosis. What comes into view is a *foreigner*, as odd as he is subtle, and who is none other than the alter ego of national man, one who reveals the latter's personal inadequacies at the same time as he points to the defects in mores and institutions. Beginning with Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) and including Voltaire's *Zadig* (1747) and *Candide* (1759), to mention only the most famous works, philosophical fiction became peopled with foreigners who invited the reader to make a twofold journey. On the one hand it is pleasant and interesting to leave one's homeland in order to enter other climes, mentalities, and governments; but on the other hand and particularly, this move is undertaken only to return to oneself and one's home, to judge or laugh at one's limitations, peculiarities, mental and political despotisms. The *foreigner* then becomes the figure onto which the penetrating, ironical mind of the philosopher is delegated—his

foreign/national

dichotomy
of foreign

↓
foreigner, b

double, his mask. He is the metaphor of the distance at which we should place ourselves in order to revive the dynamics of ideological and social transformation.

This apology of the "private" and the "strange," including "idiosyncracies"—which, however, does not cease being the leaven of a culture when the latter is aware of and transcends itself—reaches a power that still enthalls us today in the writing of Denis Diderot (1713–1784). The pinnacle of those peculiarities that other eighteenth-century writers had depicted under national colors, *Rameau's Nephew* (written in 1762, published in German in 1805, in French in 1821) internalized both the discomfort and the fascinated recognition aroused by the strange and carried them to the very bosom of eighteenth-century man. If he were to wander to the end of his passion for altering, dividing, knowing, modern man would be a foreigner to himself—a strange being whose polyphony would from that moment on be "beyond good and evil."

The Strange Man, the Cynic, and the Cosmopolitan

1. Rameau's Nephew Between Diogenes and *Myself*

When Diderot "allows [his] mind to rove wantonly," a henceforth famous partner answers him in an open dialogue, without synthesis; it is a text the cynical, "Menippean" derivation of which has often been emphasized. That partner is one of those "peculiar characters," one of those "eccentrics," held in little esteem by the philosopher, who nonetheless lets him dominate the conversation—Rameau's Nephew.

Who is the Nephew? The philosopher's opponent or his hidden self? The opposite other or the nocturnal double that comes to the surface? A clear-cut answer to the question would bring the pantomime to an end and betray the "mental trollops" that Diderot, in an extraordinary flight of polyphonic fancy, presents in fact through the confrontation between *Myself* the philosopher

*-wandering
mind*

and the strange *He*. Different and accomplices, others and same, *Myself* and *He* are in conflict, agree, even change places (*He*, insolently, all of a sudden extols virtue . . .). Rameau's Nephew *does not want* to settle down—he is the soul of a game that he does not want to stop, does not want to compromise, but wants only to challenge, displace, invert, shock, contradict. Negation, this is understood, not only of conscience and morality but of the will as passion: a twisting of sexuality—and then a negation of such negations. Take the episode at Bertin's house: the free-loading Nephew is expelled, because, he says, he has been perceived "as an other" [*comme un autre* = like the next man], while it is precisely because he is other, singular, peculiar, and, as such, makes the boring virtuous people laugh, that the latter invite him! The Nephew is conscious of his strangeness, and he is aware of that consciousness;¹⁰ he claims it against himself—gathering from it a wounded personal dignity that surprises *Myself*¹¹—and against society—deeming that those "others" deny his otherness while taking advantage of it; whereas he himself prefers not to be like "others," who actually represent only the abject consensus, the perverted mass.¹² He believes his strangeness to be essential,¹³ and considers that its one and only accomplishment, beyond the contradictory challenge to accepted values, is witticism and pantomime: "All I could do to avoid the ridicule incurred by my isolated applause was to throw in a few ironic words, which gave it a contrary interpretation."¹⁴

Witticism? The Nephew has quite simply and for once spoken "common sense." For instance: the Abbé who today enjoys being at the head of Bertin's table will daily "go down one cover." The frankness he displays is a turning inside out of deceitful words, the correction of a falsehood. Within the gyre of this negativity (true/unspoken/everyday falsehood/restored truth), the Nephew experiences the meaning of his words as a liberating process: clash of opposites, pleasure springing up, truth of laughter. The host and Mademoiselle Hus, on the other hand, incapable of that estranging motion, become judges and indignant. In short, witti-

cism would exist as such only for a consciousness on the move that becomes estranged to itself in order to have another meaning come forth, by way of the same, but also to bring forth the other of meaning, the explosion of pleasure.

Pantomime? The Nephew mimes those he talks about, but he also mimes his own feelings, displaying the objects and subjects of his discourse by means of spasmodic, climactic gestures, thus refusing to assume the single viewpoint of the relaxed speaker but breaking out in a spate of attitudes. Foreign to the consensus of others, he splits into many facets, first representing the *characters* that he mimes, next reverberating through the varied intonations and intensities of his speech, finally insinuating himself into the very *syntax* of Diderot's sentence, which, from parataxis to holding in suspense, integrates in turn the strangeness of the pantomime: "What is amusing is that while I was saying this, he was acting it out in pantomime. He was prostrate at my feet, his face on the ground, and seemed to be clutching in both his hands the tip of a slipper. He was crying and sobbing out words: 'I swear it, my dear Queen, I promise, never will I do it again, never, never, never.' Then suddenly jumping up . . ." ¹⁵

As for his voice: "He jumbled together thirty different airs, French, Italian, comic, tragic—in every style. Now in a baritone voice he sank to the pit; then straining in falsetto he tore to shreds the upper notes of some air, imitating the while the stance, walk and gestures of the several characters; being in succession furious, mollified, lordly, sneering. First a damsel weeps and he reproduces her kittenish ways; next he is a priest, a king, a tyrant; he threatens, commands, rages. Now he is a slave, he obeys." ¹⁶

This articulation of opposites, this dislocation of identity contaminate even Diderot's sentence, in which the syntax loses its subject to the benefit of the fragment-objects of the polyphonist musician's body, which invade the narrative and replace it with a fragmented image of the playing body. "He. 'Ah, you won't, eh? But I say you will and they will, it works—' Saying which, he

had seized with his right hand the fingers and wrist of his left and was bending them this way and that, until the tips touched the forearm and the joints cracked and I was afraid the bones would be dislocated." ¹⁷

Such a strategy of strangeness, played out at the same time in an uncontrolled and knowing, spontaneous and conscious manner, has a genealogy, a biology, a sociology. ¹⁸

As to genealogy, the Nephew himself suggests it when he places his discourse, at the very beginning of the satire, under the aegis of Diogenes and ends it with a new mention of the Greek cynic. ¹⁹ Neither Cesar, nor Marcus Aurelius, nor Socrates; nor will he "Catonize": "No, I should like it better between Diogenes and Phryne. I am as cheeky as the one and often visit the sisters of the other." "What a consummate dog I am," ²⁰ he says further on, thus claiming for himself the symbolic animal of the cynics. Diogenes of Sinope (412–323 B.C.), the eccentric dog-man, rancorous and scornful toward Alexander as the Nephew was with respect to Rameau, was looking for a man from the threshold of his barrel before taking refuge in it if he was disappointed in his expectations. Posterity has remembered the incisive expressions of the cynics: their art of argumentative paradox, whereby they assume the position of their opponents and uphold in turn two contradictory points of view; their mockery of vices and social conventions, which leads to an ethics of naturalness and licentiousness, both aggressive and wanton. Eccentric, if not insane, the cynic displays the *other* of reason; foreign to social conventions, he discredits himself in order to have us face our shameful otherness. Thus, a *high* cynicism, aspiring to a mystique of human purity, is linked to a *low* cynicism that—in order to reach it (but does one not often forget the ends when one gives oneself over to the means?)—displays an alienated, debased man. Diderot, who wrote the "Cynic" article in the *Encyclopédie*, often mentions Diogenes as a model to identify with. ²¹ But the Nephew counterfeits Diogenes: his cynicism is an "effrontery," a sham that scoffs at the philosophical loftiness

eventually chosen by Diogenes. He replaces the cynic virtue of the Ancients with infatuation, flattery, glibness, and material ease. The Nephew is the cynic's cynic: he experiences its rhetoric and carries it to its peak, remaining up to the end foreign to ethical identity, even that of the cynic. In that sense, the Nephew is closer to a cynic who left his imprint on literary genres by inventing a new model of satire—Menippus of Gadara, who, besides, was a corrupt usurer and ended up hanging himself. Diderot speaks of him in his article on the "Cynic": "Menippus [. . .] was one of the last cynics of the ancient school; he made himself more commendable for the kind of writing to which he gave his name than for his morals and his philosophy." Bakhtin sees him as the founder of dialogism and of that rhetorical polyphony out of which the western novel arose.²² Outside of the ethical heroism of Diogenes, who succeeded in submitting the passion-inspired strangeness of natural man to a moral imperative, the Nephew, and Diderot too, leave such asceticism to Rousseau; they adopt only its acceptable portion—the play in language, the logical violence that destroys and does not cease being aware even of its own disappearance. The Nephew's pantomime is faithful only to Menippus' rhetoric, not to Diogenes' virtue. Diderot never conveyed so drastically the fact that the ethics of his day could only be a given language: a cultivation of strangeness to the very end, without finish or conclusion.

Such a scouring of apparent identities—ethical or logical—is supported by a biological model. The strangeness of the uncommon, exceptional, but frank person—in Diderot's satire "frankness" takes the place of any Catonizing apology of "truth"—unfurls within a polyphonic rhetoric that is the visible facet of a spasmodic, convulsive nature, centered in the nervous system discovered by the physicians of the time, and which Diderot adopted. From Albrecht von Haller to Whytt, from William Cullen and John Brown to Kaau Boerhaave, without forgetting the French physicians Louis de Lacaze, Bordeu, Fouquet, and Menuret de Chambaud (who wrote the article on "Spasm" in the *Encyclopé-*

die), the medical currency of Diderot's day was to discover the spasm everywhere.²³ Diderot shows himself to be very mindful of it in his *Eléments de physiologie*. He goes so far as to view any sensation as bound to "organic convulsions."²⁴ Indeed, when the Nephew reaches the climactic frankness of his pantomime, he reveals his "thoughts," which are at the same time sensations, through a language made up of spasms, convulsions, and starts. Strangeness, which we have seen as rhetorical (cultural), would be neurological in nature (organic): "There is not the slightest difference between a wide-awake physician and a dreaming philosopher,"²⁵ as long as both scrutinize the strange.

Surreptitiously, strangeness is also political. A rhetorician with peculiar nerves, the Nephew could not have come from a single place, a single side, a single country. From the very outset he regrets—which is to say, admires—that men of genius "don't know not what it is to be citizens";²⁶ and they are precisely the ones he wants to resemble, they are an exceptional model not to be imitated by the crowd. Putting citizenship aside, what would then be the vessel for the unrestrained pantomime performed by such a convulsive harpsichord player? *He*: "I look about me and take my positions, or else I entertain myself watching others take theirs."²⁷ The stance is temporary, movable, changing—if steady, it is artificial; provisional, it is wandering. Original, it strays from the origin, it knows neither root nor soil, it is traveling, foreign. "In the whole country only one man walks—the King. Everybody else takes a position." The strange Rameau is surely not the King. But is the King still sovereign at the time the dialogue takes place? "One has a homeland, under a good king, none under a bad one," Voltaire asserted.²⁸ *Myself*, who often really embraces at full tilt the logic of *He*, and even forestalls it, believes that even the king postures before his mistress and before God ("Whoever stands in need of another is needy and takes a position").²⁹ But in such a case, there would not even be a king? Nor would there be a kingdom, since it would lack a king? Therefore nothing works, because there is no sovereignty,

beginning with the kingdom? The strange man, spasmodic and pantomimic, would be the inhabitant of a country without power, the sociological symptom of a political transition. If he claimed strangeness to the point of idiosyncrasy ("The older the institution the more the idioms; the worse the times become, the more the idioms multiply"),³⁰ would it not also be because political institutions that are undergoing a crisis no longer insure the symbolic identity of the power and the persons? *Myself* the philosopher generalizes human instability, which he suspects lies with all as soon as there is dependency on the other. More pragmatic, however, the Nephew comes out with it: the king must walk if the kingdom is to be. Or else—and *Myself* confirms the royal poverty—there no longer is a kingdom where to stand. Relieved of political power, the posturing man is the same as a man without kingdom. Being frank to the point of strangeness reveals modern man on the political level as a man without a country. His pantomimic positions could only be assumed by cutting through the kingdom, by going across the borders of wobbly sovereignties. Into cosmopolitanism.

2. Fougeret de Monbron, a Cosmopolitan
"with a Shaggy Heart"

A "lumpen-intelligentsia" thus emerged above nations, refusing to belong to phantom kingdoms and ravaged countries. "Cosmopolitan" reverberates like a challenge, if not like a mockery. Jaucourt's article in the *Encyclopédie* points out that "cosmopolitan" or "cosmopolite" is used sometimes jokingly to refer to one "who has no fixed abode" or one "who is nowhere a foreigner." The definition repeats that of the 1721 *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*: a "cosmopolitan" is a man "who has no fixed abode or a man who is nowhere a foreigner." The first text to bear the title *Le Cosmopolite ou le citoyen du Monde*, in 1750, is signed by Fougeret de Monbron.³¹

Who is he? Diderot ran into him at the Opera.

We didn't know Pergolesi then; and Lulli we considered sublime. In the rapture of my ecstasy I grabbed my neighbor Mont-

bron by the arm and said to him, "You will agree, Sir, that this is beautiful." The man with a sallow complexion, black, bushy eyebrows, fierce, covert eyes, answered, "I don't appreciate that."

"You don't appreciate that?"

"No; I have a shaggy heart . . ."

I shudder; I move away from the two-footed tiger.³²

It has often been suggested that *Rameau's Nephew* might have been inspired by this cosmopolitan who described himself to the philosopher as having a "shaggy heart."³³ An angry text, scoffing at all nations (beginning with the English and the Turks, including the Spanish, the Italians, and of course the French, and so on) and even more so all beliefs, *Le Cosmopolite* advocates, in an offhand way and not without skill, hatred and selfishness as antidotes to ambient hypocrisy. Except for the art of pantomime—which is essential—Monbron's creed cannot be distinguished from that of the Nephew. Thus: "I most readily and sincerely admit that I am worth precisely nothing, and the difference there is between others and myself is that I am bold enough to take off the mask"; "I am isolated in the midst of wanderers." In the spirit of the prevailing neo-Stoicism Fougeret borrows his epigraph from Cicero: "*Patria est ubicumque est bene*" (*Tusculanes*, V); but he vitiates the cosmopolitanism of the ancients by showing the vices of each nation as being the mainspring of his passion for travel. Fougeret's cosmopolite is shrill, bitter, full of hatred. A character trait or a rhetorical figure—or undoubtedly both at the same time—such malevolence is truly dynamite that destroys borders and shatters the hallowed legitimacy of nations. One reads this *Cosmopolite* with the embarrassment provoked by the pathology of excesses. And yet, upon a second reading, even though one will not condone so much irascible selfishness, one cannot help recognizing that a great deal of violence and paroxysmal iconoclasm was necessary before a man of the neoclassic century or even of the enlightenment could tear himself away from the most primal and seemingly most trifling covenant—belonging to the country "tribe." "The Universe is a kind of book, of which one has read no more than the first page when

one has seen only one's country" is what Fougeret said when he was freed after having been arrested in November 1748. "I leafed through quite a few, which I found almost equally bad. Such a perusal did not prove fruitless. I hated my homeland, and all the uncivilities of the various peoples among whom I lived have reconciled me with it. If I had reaped no other profit from my travels save that one, I should regret neither their cost nor the strain they caused."³⁴ Byron remembered the beginning of those lines for his epigraph to *Childe Harold*. But the "patriotism" of the repentant cosmopolitan is deceptive. There was soul-searching, musing over the personal wound and, therefore, extolling of that which is one's own, surely—but certainly no patriotism. Beliefs, even territorial ones, hardly hold the attention of the negativist who knows, ironically, that he has a "shaggy heart." Citizen of the world out of scorn for all countries, Fougeret indeed does not admit of belonging to any nation.³⁵ Statements such as "My restless imagination could not sympathize with methodical order,"³⁶ or, "I warn you that my wilful spirit knows no rule and that, like the squirrel, it leaps from limb to limb without settling on any one,"³⁷ might indeed have been spoken by the Nephew. Subjectivistic relativism, hatred toward others and oneself, and the feeling of being empty and fallacious, govern the impossibility of settling down and the acid laughter of such a cosmopolitan.³⁸

Fougeret's malevolent cosmopolitanism, which is certainly ridiculous, in fact discloses the violence and strangeness of the subjective facet of cosmopolitanism—not the neutral serenity of philosophical wisdom that remains above borders, but the passionate tearing away that shakes the identity of one who no longer recognizes himself in the community of his own people. The drama of the foreigner, tossed from his bruised narcissism to a fascinated hatred for the other, could find its expression in this embittered text, the excessiveness of which suggests, across the centuries, Zeno's Republic and Menippus' cynicism. Diderot's genius changed such intentions, straightforward to be sure but

brutal and immoderate, into a rhetoric that is also emancipated and yet composed with an art that endows drives with adequate signs. To Fougeret's exultation Diderot appends—more than he opposes . . .—culture. Nonetheless Fougeret's style lacks neither precision nor savor: it tends toward its consumption into truth, even if it remains essentially a record of complaint and scorn. Renowned readers have appreciated it and used it: besides Byron, there is Lessing, Voltaire, Goldsmith,³⁹ and Stern.⁴⁰

The pejorative meaning of the word "cosmopolitan" was undoubtedly enhanced by such provocations that further irked the protective feeling for the nation, jealous of its prerogatives. "Whoever does not adopt his homeland is not a good citizen," as the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* notes in 1762, in the article "Cosmopolitan." And Rousseau among others: "Any partial society, when it is close and well-knit, becomes alienated from the larger one. Any patriot is hard on foreigners; they are mere men, they are nothing in his eyes. This drawback is inevitable, but it is slight. The essential is to be good with the people one lives with. [. . .] Beware of those cosmopolitans who seek far off in their books duties they fail to accomplish close by."⁴¹ *note!*

Montesquieu all the same—as we have seen—asserted along with Shaftesbury a positive value for cosmopolitanism, in a century where many famous cosmopolitans can be mentioned, among which Charles Pinot Duclos (*Considérations sur les mœurs de ce siècle*, 1751), the Prince de Ligne, and also Grimm, Galiani, Bonneval, Casanova, Caraccioli. "Although one should love one's homeland, it is just as ridiculous to speak of it with prejudice as it would be of one's wife, birth, or property. How foolish vanity, wherever it is shown!"⁴² "If I knew something useful to my homeland and detrimental to Europe, or else useful to Europe and detrimental to mankind, I would consider it a crime."⁴³

With its raging reverse and generous obverse, between Fougeret and Montesquieu, cosmopolitanism henceforth appears as an audacity, utopian for the time being, but which must be taken into account by human beings who are conscious of their limita-

tions and aspire to transcend them in the organization of social bonds and institutions.

3. The Nephew with Hegel: Culture as Strangeness

When, in its dialectical motion, the world of the Spirit becomes foreign to itself,⁴⁴ Hegel deems that two parts of the spiritual world start facing each other: actuality and pure consciousness. "But the existence of this world, as also the actuality of self-consciousness, depends on the process through which self-consciousness divests itself of its personality, by so doing creates its world, and treats it as something alien and external, of which it must now take possession."⁴⁵ This process is, as Hegel saw it, constituted by culture (*Bildung*)—political, economic, social, intellectual . . . —as *estrangement* of the natural being. The transition of the *thought-constituted substance* to *concrete actuality* is thus effected, as, conversely, that of *determinate individuality* to its *essential constitution* (Jean Hyppolite comments: the individual becomes universal at the same time as universal substance increases in actuality).

This argument, the maze of which cannot be traced here, takes as its horizon and object seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French culture, coming to a head with the enlightenment. It relies on Rameau's Nephew to illustrate the notion of culture as estrangement of the individual into the universal, and vice versa. The strangeness collected at Diderot's font takes on three aspects:—individuality becomes stable only by giving up the self for the universal: that is the role of *Myself* the philosopher. Lacking such an accomplishment, there is only a "pretense of individuality," individuality is "mere presumptive existence" and passes "simply for what it is," for a kind of being, an *espèce*. Here Hegel takes up the French word and recalls the meaning given to it by Lui in *Rameau's Nephew*: "The most horrible of all nicknames, for it signifies mediocrity, and denotes the highest degree of contempt";⁴⁶

—still relying on the Nephew's experiences, particularly the

episode at Bertin's house, while trying to extract from them a dialectic of abjection between patron and client (p. 543), Hegel brings out the logic of the French monarchy as another illustration of self-estrangement. The power of the State becomes alienated in an individual and a name—"Louis" ("state-power becomes, by the self-abasement of the noble consciousness, a universal that renounces itself, becomes [. . .] the empty name"—p. 535). What follows is "the heroism of flattery," where language becomes alienated in turn as a pure appearance in order to seek an empty power, for it is wealth that constitutes true power. Cultural self-estrangement is here revealed through the historical reality of courtly culture—which is mere seeming, hypocrisy, and appearances, and against which the inverted strangeness of the Nephew will assert itself by claiming frankness;—finally, the "distraught utterance" is the major representation of cultural estrangement. Through an ultimate reversion, it does not become frozen into the "placid consciousness" of a self that is unaware of its underlying contradiction but on the contrary abolishes the distinction between "noble" and "base," confronts wealth with the inner abyss, expresses a "rebellion that repudiates its own repudiation" (p. 540), knows its naturalness, its flattery, or its abjection; in short, to each of its moments it attaches its opposite. This is "pure self-consciousness," which ends up, like the speech of Rameau's Nephew, "in absolute and universal inversion of reality and thought." But that is precisely "pure culture" (p. 541): "The distraught and disintegrated soul is, however, aware of inversion; it is, in fact, a consciousness of absolute inversion" (p. 543).

This sort of strangeness, which Hegel also describes as "self-transparent" and "distracted" (p. 544) or as "a universal deception of itself and others," becomes the "greatest truth" on the very account of the "shamelessness manifested in stating this deceit" (p. 543). One is struck by Hegel's faithfulness to that cynical polyphony of culture as embodied by the Nephew.⁴⁷ He raises it above "that simple, placid consciousness of the good and

the true," characteristic of the philosopher *Myself*, who can "say nothing" and is "merely an abstraction," barely capable of gathering "into a trifling form the meaning of what spirit said" (pp. 544-545). Nevertheless, this strangeness of culture, even though it be highly appreciated, remains yet with Hegel a "perversion" that, as scintillation of the spirit and all the more so of witticism, must be transcended. The polyphony of Hegel, a careful reader of Diderot, gives way before the triadism of his dialectic. The world of Culture will be surpassed by that of Morality before finally turning into that of Religion and absolute Spirit, for only the latter will be able to replace the simple "presentations" of culture's perverse language with thoughts (p. 549). Indeed, Culture in Hegel's sense, in its scission and essential strangeness, proceeds by way of *disunion* and *contradiction*, which it unifies in its wrenching discourse; but the latter merely judges "by reducing everything to the self in its aridity" and cannot grasp the substantial content of thought.

Might Culture Be French?

Out of the many implications of such remarks on cultural estrangement as opposed to moral and religious conciliation, one might consider a few concerning the novel, the imagination, and their present shape—the mass media. The perversion that sets up the opposites in human signification facing each other, with neither synthesis, nor internalization, nor supersession—that is indeed novelistic culture in the polyphonic sense of the French eighteenth century. It still underlies the great imaginary syntheses, religious in inspiration, of the nineteenth century, such as Dostoyevsky's dialogism, which shattered the believer's virtue by dint of idiocy.

One might well ask if France has not preeminently continued to be the area of culture—in the sense of Hegel's "perversion"; one might ask if it has not identified with culture, and if culture, defined in such a manner, is not definitively French. Nowhere else indeed, is political power—as if it continued a form of

Hegel's perversion

