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introduction

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Born in 1947 in Paris, Guy Lardreau teaches philosophy at the Lycée Carnot in Dijon. Although his work ranges across a wide spectrum of radical political and spiritual themes, his specialist training is in Syriac and Coptic studies. His books include a reflection on the forms and implications of cultural revolution (*L'Ange*, co-authored with Christian Jambet, 1976), a monograph on the early Syrian bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug (*Discours philosophique et discours spirituel*, 1985), a trilogy of meditations on crime, science and fantastic fiction (*Fictions philosophiques et science-fiction*, 1988; *Présentation criminelle de quelques concepts majeurs de la philosophie*, 1997; *Intuition philosophique et présence fantastique*, forthcoming), a brief critique of Deleuze occasioned by the latter's readings in the history of philosophy (*L'Exercice différé de la philosophie*, 1999), the more substantial treatise *La Véracité* (1993), and the manifesto *Vive le matérialisme!* (originally published as anonymous, 2001). Like Badiou and Jambet, Lardreau emphasises the systematic and uncompromising orientation of philosophy, one marked above all by Mao and Lacan; unlike Badiou or Jambet, however, Lardreau accords Kant a central place in his effort to reconcile a post-Maoist conception of politics with a rational but fully "negative" – or "non-dishonest" – conception of philosophy.

The question that guides much of Lardreau's work is most starkly posed in the sections of *L'Ange* that refer to the exemplary experience of those early Christian ascetics (Saint Jerome, Chrysostomos, etc.), who both lived and declared a particularly intransigent form of "absolute revolt" against the prevailing way of the world.[1] The early monastic thinkers, inspired by a resolutely Manichaean conception of reality, propose their own version of "cultural revolution" *avant la lettre*: they invert every accepted form of value, renounce all inheritance, refuse any loyalty to family and familiarity, deny the body, reject sexual difference and desire, pursue a heroic anonymity, adopt a permanent posture of self-criticism, embrace the most severe forms of frugality, discipline and elation. They accept, in short, that "the path of saintliness is a path of struggle *alone*."[2] How could it happen, asks Lardreau, that this uncompromising posture of revolt was then so easily and so quickly accommodated within a new configuration of mastery? How could a discourse of pure revolt, directed

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THE PROBLEM OF GREAT POLITICS IN THE LIGHT OF OBVIOUSLY DEFICIENT MODES OF SUBJECTIVATION

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against the figure of mastery as such, directed against the very survival of society, in turn become the witless "instrument of the Master," i.e. allow itself to be used, as a sort of safely marginalised lunatic fringe, in ways that help consolidate the social and institutional mainstream? Or, in short, how was the discourse of saints bent to the needs of a *church*? The answer: through the conversion of cultural revolution into a merely "ideological" revolution. Whereas cultural revolution rejects every form of mastery in the un-mediated dualism of oppression/revolt, ideological revolution mediates subjective responses to socio-historical "causes" or conditions and integrates rebellion within a rational historical order or development – and in the process it transforms the critique of mastery into the mere substitution of one master for another.[3]

The writing of *L'Ange* coincided with the realisation that the Maoist rebellion that Lardreau had so enthusiastically embraced was vulnerable to a similar outcome.[4] Both historical sequences seemed to culminate in newly extreme forms of obedience (to the Church, to the party). Was it then the necessary fate of radical revolt to end in radical submission? Lardreau's own answer to this question, here and subsequently, is to rebel against the very form of the question itself: revolt persists as an "unreasonable" and unreasoned "wager" against history, against desire, against every form of reconciliation or deduction. "Once again we will make the senseless wager: the Angel has always been defeated – but he will triumph, in the end, in an unprecedented revolution"[5] Unlike more orthodox versions of Maoism, Lardreau makes of this un-reasonable and discontinuous quality of revolt its highest virtue, an index of its unassimilable resistance to integration in the rational progress of history.

It is in the form of a pure wager, then, that Lardreau and Jambet seek "to preserve, against all forms of power and domination, the hope that a different world, despite everything, is possible," by "pushing the logic of rebellion to its limit, to the point of paroxysm."[6] This involves, among other things: (a) the refusal of conventional forms of "coherence" (hence the book's disjointed composition and syntactical complexity); (b) an acceptance, in the wake of Lacan, that there is no possible liberation within the field of desire, that *all* desire is subject to mastery and law (hence the critique of Sade, Deleuze, and Lyotard: the free circulation of desire is a contradiction in terms); (c) a consequent insistence upon the "total disjunction of sexuality and rebellion" (hence the affirmation of "Angelism" as indifferent to sexuality, and in particular as indifferent to what Lacan describes as the sexual non-relation[7]); (d) a refusal of historical time, i.e. of the dialectical or "ideological" coordination of structural conditions and subjective responses (hence the presumption that "the past doesn't exist – and this is precisely our most profound metaphysical thesis, our 'esoteric' thesis …"). The Manichaean dualism of revolt prevails solely in the purity of the present. In contrast to more orthodox conceptions of Maoism, such Angelic subjectivity cannot simply be derived from collective struggle or dialectical progression; it can only arise abruptly, immediately, in a sort of sublime indifference to any dialectical impasse.[8]

Lardreau thus persists in a project that most of his Maoist fellow travellers were soon to abandon as indefensibly utopian. At the same time, however, he has always insisted that the real "enemy is semblance" and dissemblance.[9] Beware of affirmation, he warns Deleuze, since it provides cover for many falsehoods. Against all imaginary delusions, against all reassuring conceptions of wholeness, against every figure of reconciliation, Lardreau perseveres in his starkly negative path. "Negative philosophy is ineluctably worth more than any affirmation for, affirming nothing, it has no interest in betrayal, and it never lies."[10] It is this peculiar combination of uncompromising principle and remorseless negativity, this *systematic scepticism*, that best characterises Lardreau's conception of philosophy. "To philosophise any given statement," he writes at the end of this same rejoinder to Deleuze, "is to confront it with its nullity" – but only on this condition: that the statements thus nullified come from anywhere, from any source (religious, fictional, rational, "opinionated," etc.), without concern for their dignity or worth. This ardent indifference is itself the sole basis for "the dignity of philosophy." It's on this

basis that a genuinely negative philosophy can proceed as "super-affirmation, as pure affirmation."[11] Philosophy is the only discourse that is active solely when it welcomes statements that are "absolutely heterogeneous" with if not implacably "hostile" to it.[12] Lardreau takes up the spiritual discourse of Philoxenus, for instance, in order to show (among other things) how, confronted by philosophy's insistence on systematic reasoning, it sustains an irreducible resistance to this reasoning – how it remains "incommensurable" with the world.[13]

As a general rule, therefore, philosophy reflects upon statements or situations drawn from other discourses in so far as these present themselves as inaccessible to all reflection, in keeping with a logic that resembles a generalised negative theology. "Every form of intelligibility stumbles upon a remainder, a left-over, which interrupts its closure. This remainder is the real itself," which persists as "that which can neither be said nor understood."[14] Forever lost behind the "wall of words," this ungraspable real "tolerates only oblique statements" which evoke its absence. Philosophy itself can only pursue such evocation through non-philosophical – non-systematic, non-rational, non-totalisable … – discourses. In this context the proper function of fiction, for instance, is not to create imaginary realities that we might "possess" but rather to indicate the cruel limit of all imagination, to dramatise the irreducible disjunction between discourse and world, to allow for the experience of "an object of which no image might form."[15]

Lardreau provides the most substantial and coherent statement of his position in *La Véracité: essai d'une philosophie négative* (1993). His opening question is not complicated: at the most abstract level, is there or isn't there something like a nature or norm that guides the spontaneous activity of a subject? Is the constituent activity of a subject rule-bound or anarchic? Is the subject constituted or constituent? In short: "is the principle subject, or the subject principle?" That Lardreau opts for the second answer will come as no surprise. The *pure* affirmation of a constituent subjectivity only holds up, however, in so far as it is in turn able to negate or transcend itself, in so far as subjective constitution recognises itself as not-all (the subject is never simply a part of the empirical world, any more than it is able to constitute every aspect of that world). The "real subject is non-constituent and non-constituted", it is independent of the operations whereby, along conventional Kantian lines, the constituent subject orders its world: it endures in an excess in which the subject counts for nothing, in which collapse all distinctions between matter and form, between the one and the multiple, between God and his creation.[16] Here, as everywhere in his work, the guiding idea is not so much Wittgenstein's notion that we must keep quiet about that which cannot be said (and which is alone of any genuine value) but, on the contrary, that "we cannot *not* say that which we cannot say."[17]

Roughly speaking, the basic argument of the book involves a sort of combination of Kantian and neo-Platonic ideas (filtered through various "knottings" of the Lacanian categories of real, symbolic and imaginary), in such a way as to distinguish alternative versions of three fundamental concepts: a totalising from a non-totalising conception of subjective *constitution*, a conventional or "abject" from a super-affirmative or "heroic" conception of *negation*, and a harmonious or "eclectic" from a discontinuous yet "hierarchical" (Leibniz-inspired) conception of *symphony*, or composition.[18] From Kant, Lardreau assumes the noumenal or inaccessible status of the real, along with the constituted–constitutive (or passive–active) ambiguity of subjective experience. The variably active aspects of the subject ground both the constituent dimension of language (Lacan's symbolic) and the constituted dimension of sensibility (Lacan's imaginary), while the subject's passive aspect bears witness to the utterly unconstitutable (unsayable, insensible, incommensurable, etc.) dimension of the real. However passive it might be, this bearing-witness is nonetheless enough to demonstrate that the real never simply escapes articulation altogether; from the neo-Platonic tradition, then, Lardreau retains the negative yet imperative qualities attributed to a One beyond being. Neo-Platonic, Kantian and Lacanian inspirations combine here to secure the rights of an unsayable real precisely

within discourse, to compel the respectful articulation of that which is as much beneath contempt as it is indifferent to scorn.

Again broadly in line with Kantian categories, Lardreau then applies such non-contempt to the fields of politics, morality, and aesthetics. This implies, more concretely: in politics, the celebration of pure, sublime revolt, revolt independent of all but the most evanescent of objects, revolt for its own sake ("for two cents …"), always at the risk of a "barbarous" indifference to the other; in morality, a compensatory compassion in the face of suffering, pity for the other as victim, always at the risk of a quasi-quiescent passivity; in aesthetics, a sensitivity to the sensual presence or "jubilant" particularity of things, always at the risk of nostalgia for the figural, the sacred, or the ineffable.[19] Taken together, the result resembles nothing so much as a deliberately perverse version of the categorical imperative: a commandment to rebel for rebellion's sake, which avoids barbarism only to the extent that it turns this commandment against itself in a sort of permanent crucifixion of reason – the unending and eternally dutiful negation of duty as such.

notes

1 Lardreau and Jambet, *L'Ange* 99.

2 Ibid. 148.

3 Ibid. 151–52. In the case of the early Orthodox Christians, such an ideological revolution turned on the reduction of asceticism to a *merely* monastic ideal, the matter of an exceptional and therefore harmless "vocation," which precisely as an exception can be brought to sit comfortably alongside the normal order of work and procreation in the world (ibid. 112ff.).

4 Ibid. 152.

> I finally came to understand, as our own cultural revolution began to wane, how we too had no doubt been merely a moment in an ideological revolution that made use of us, and that in a sense we had never understood […]. We had set out to make war against the philosophy of will, understood as the thought of *conatus*, of survival, but in the end we found only a philosophy that led us to renounce our *own* will – in other words, a philosophy of the Master's will. (Ibid. 135)

Because it seemed critical of the violent consequences of Mao's Cultural Revolution (a theme which emerges more explicitly in its sequel, *Le Monde* [1978]), *L'Ange* has often been associated with the emergence, in the late 1970s, of the mainly liberal *Nouveaux philosophes*. Apart from a shared horror of state-managed violence, however, it is difficult to imagine two more antithetical approaches to philosophy. Lardreau and Jambet themselves quickly sought to distance themselves from this association (see, for instance, their article "Une dernière fois: contre la 'Nouvelle Philosophie,'" *La Nef,* Jan. 1978), and have denied it ever since. "I don't pretend to write anything other than a Maoist philosophy," Lardreau insists in this book which continues "to provide intellectuals reasons to take up the cause of the people" (*L'Ange* 91, 42 – and as for "the masses, they don't need the Angel, as they are themselves angelic" (79)).

5 *L'Ange* 152.

6 Lardreau and Jambet, *L'Ange* 10, 13; cf. 22, 67.

7 Ibid. 34, 102.

8 Ibid. 21, 57.

9 Ibid. 22, 37.

10 Lardreau, *L'Exercice différé de la philosophie* 88. Point by point, Lardreau opposes his negative and materialist philosophy, oriented towards transcendence and death, to Deleuze's "affirmative" and "spiritualist" philosophy, oriented towards immanence and life (84–85).

11 Lardreau, *La Véracité* 94–96. "Such is the little Copernican revolution on offer here: that we should start out from the certainty that there is no need for a revolution, or if you prefer, that it has always already happened. When you're hungry everything tastes good, and philosophers, like butchers, know that you can use all of the pig but the squeak [*dans la philosophie, comme dans le cochon, tout est bon*]" (17).

12 Lardreau. *L'Exercice différé* 89, 21; *Présentation criminelle* 115.

13 Lardreau, *Discours philosophique* 13–15.

14 Lardreau, *Fictions philosophiques et science-fiction* 271–72; cf. *L'Ange* 36.

15 Lardreau, *Fictions philosophiques et science-fiction* 145, 45–46. Science fiction thus proceeds, notes Lardreau, with a sort of exuberant rational autonomy comparable to that embraced most dramatically by Leibniz. Lardreau likewise finds parallels between the structure of certain kinds of philosophical "inquiry" and the empiricist presuppositions of detective fiction, and finds echoes of classical conceptions of chance and fortune in the moments when a master criminal accidentally loses his grip on a situation, and so on (cf. *Présentation criminelle* 22ff.).

16 Lardreau, *La Véracité* 32, 51, 46.

17 Lardreau, *La Véracité* 15; *Fictions philosophiques et science-fiction* 272–76.

18 Lardreau, *La Véracité* 16–18.

19 Ibid. 249, 183–84, 314.

the problem of great politics in the light of obviously deficient modes of subjectivation[1]

guy lardreau

For a long time now I have been haunted by a problem as massive as it is crude: how can something undertaken in order to make things better eventually take a turn for the worse – and this not because the will behind this undertaking became lazy or forgetful,[2] but on account of this will itself?

Couched in such general terms, versions of this problem have existed ever since people first began trying to connect an intention to discernible changes (henceforth envisioned as its "effects"), and to judge the validity of the former by the consequences of the latter.[3] The problem is no less ancient in its political guise – as ancient, no doubt, as that mode of reflection which compared, as Herodotus did, various types of constitution so as to identify the best among them. It was then enough, in order for our problem explicitly to be recognised as such, to introduce movement and change into the field of comparison, to begin thinking of politics in the context of innovation and possibility, of desirable transformation – in short, in the context of history. This was the step taken by Plato, when he came up against the drama of *metabole*, or change.

However, there is no denying the fact that it is only in the modern age that this problem has come to acquire its extreme urgency. This is because, first of all, the modern age is properly the age of Great Politics (a phrase I borrow from Nietzsche, along with its programme: the effort to "break the history of the world in two" – or as the Cultural Revolution was to say, "to change the very essence of man"). The modern age decided that it is in politics that the supersensible vocation of culture can and must become sensible. In the second place, this is because the modern age is the age that was empirically determined by two sets of events which, as a matter of fact if not as a matter of principle, seemed to provide their contemporaries with proof for their belief that all Great Politics was destined to end in disastrous and criminal failure. These events were the French Revolution (in so far as the Terror is held to be its truth) and the Communist Revolutions (in so far as these are supposed to find their ultimate expression in the camps). In the wake of these events, many other efforts to bend figures of political power to the highest ends of reason will likewise be shown to result in the necessary reversal of best into worst.

The point is then: how are we to avoid responding to this crude problem with an equally crude solution? This is all the more important since theoretical crudeness (which makes do, in the main, with "human nature"[4]) is here, at one and the same time, practical servility (which eternalises failure and exults in garrulous moaning and mourning).

It is important to remember, in this context, that when I say that this problem haunts me, I certainly do not mean that I *myself* pose the problem (which is of no interest either way), any more than I mean that it poses *itself* (i.e. that it is imposed by the real – a question that will be left unanswered here). I simply observe that *it is posed*: as far as general opinion is concerned, the problem exists.

In other words, the problem raised by the fact that revolutionary intentions may be inverted is a problem that can itself only accede to the transcendental regime (understood as the interrogative work whereby something can be analysed in terms of its a priori conditions of possibility) if it is displaced, i.e. if it no longer concerns this inversion as such, but rather the fact that this inversion *appears* as problematic in the eyes of opinion (in short: if the problem itself becomes its own object).

For if we simply suppose that, thus far, every popular uprising for the sake of the good has always turned bad – and even if this continues into the future (as often as you like) – still this supposition will never concern anything more than an empirical question. In each case it will concern a determinate inversion of good into

bad, one that determines its particular and contingent conditions of possibility in a particular way. In order that we might ask how such inversion is possible a priori, we must be in a position to affirm it as necessary (whereas, conversely, when others ask why it always seems to happen this way, they provide, in the very form of the question, just that eternalising response they were looking for). But it is precisely this that is altogether impossible, for the very same reasons that Kant (when he comes to consider the idea of progress) rejects the "terrorist" position along with those he characterises as "eudemonist" and "abderitist."[5]

It might perhaps be objected that, taken in itself, the problem's own existence is no less particular and contingent – is not precisely this contingency emphasised in the referral of its urgency to those sets of events I have already mentioned? In response to this I say that while both the genesis and the individual existence of the problem are indeed empirical matters (and as such can be treated as objects of investigation), this in no way alters the fact that our problem poses itself as necessary and universal, and it is from this sole pretension that it exists, not *tout court*, but precisely *as* a problem. The logic here is similar to the logic that allows us to conclude, when all is said and done, that it does not much matter if aesthetic judgement is always empirically determined (here again it is Kant who guides us): what alone distinguishes it is the way it claims for itself the *form* of a universal and necessary validity.

We're now in a position to realise that what has both lent our problem its crudeness and servility and made it so obscure that it continues to haunt me to this day, is the fact that it confuses an empirical question (which deals with the object to which the problem refers) and a transcendental question (which deals with the problem itself). By resolutely choosing to consider only the latter question we are free to dismiss both what we might call the question "of principle," i.e. the false transcendental question (which asks, why *must* rebellion always turn into barbarism?) and what we might call the question "of fact," i.e. the false empirical question (which asks, why is it that *all* rebellions end in crime?).[6]

What we are left with is indeed, at least to begin with, a matter of assertion [*constat*], but what is asserted is not a fact but an *appearance*: the appearance of a problem. And we need not even concern ourselves with whether this problem is well or poorly founded, but only with what its pure existence as appearance implies.

By thus asking questions about an appearance, however, we obviously stop thinking in terms of nature or substance, so as to think instead in the terms of a subject. So the question must be: which subject, or rather (since the subject summoned by politics, albeit a constituent subject, is itself initially constituted), which mode of subjectivation does the existence of this other subject imply – this other subject (who may well be grammatically indistinguishable from the first) who remains "haunted" by the problem? The question, however, must be put in the plural, since the appearance itself is plural, and since it is in all the diversity of its various forms that the reversal of good into bad is "attested." And finally, since what is experienced in each of these forms is the experience of a deficient world, and since this deficiency can only stem from the subject that constitutes this world, so then our question finds its very last refinement in these terms: which deficient modes of subjectivation are revealed by that appearance which the problem of Great Politics produces (and on whose basis this problem then grounds itself)?

It seems to me that the Lacanian doctrine of the "knot," at least in the rather liberal if not heretical use that I tend to make of it, provides us with a reliable guide for the investigation and identification of these modes.[7]

I will assume here a certain familiarity with the letters R, S, I, along with the concepts (real, symbolic, imaginary) to which they refer; I will also take for granted the idea that the real is the very knot that entwines the other rings, rather than one of the rings themselves.[8] It follows that it is crucial to distinguish not only the real from reality (which is the imaginarisation of the real) but also the real of the knot from the real *in* the knot (R). We should also observe, furthermore, that there is one way of failing the knot [*manquer au noeud*] that is widely recognised by those who

make use of these three letters, and to which they often refer in order to explain various social phenomena, namely imaginarisation, to which I referred a moment ago as if it was a "familiar" concept. What does imaginarisation involve? The contamination, in short, of R and S by I, i.e. the extension to the entire knot of that which applies to only one of its rings.

The hypothesis to which we must now turn, it seems to me, is that it is possible to raise up each one of the letters in this way, into the position of the real of the knot, i.e. to expand each one of them to the point that it alone occupies the sole place of the knot. Imaginarisation, drawing its energy from the obviously imaginary character of its own version of the knot, demonstrates that the imagination is a creative agency [*instance*];[9] in much the same way, symbolicisation triumphs in so far as it is able to say that everything is a matter of language, and *real*isation [*réellisation*] proceeds in so far as it is able to exploit the homonym that blurs the difference between the real of the knot and the real in the knot. To be sure, this homonymy fails to dispel the graphic artifice adopted here, because this artifice is not accidental but essential. Indeed, if the name of one of the rings of the knot finds itself chosen to designate the very truth of the knot itself, this is because what it designates is precisely the refusal of all ties, all relations, all properties, all predictability – in brief, the refusal of all "essence" (as understood in Hegelian logic) – such that the knotting can itself only be grasped by whose who have first of all accepted that the truth is not whole, or lacks everything [*la vérité manque de tout*].

In this way, the image, the name [*le nom*], and the no [*le non*] can each, in turn, come to figure betrayal of the knot.

To my mind, it is clear that the three deficient modes of subjectivation that can be inferred from these three mutilated configurations of the knot should be recognised as sources of aberrant effects for every possible regime of experience, and as capable of subjecting all representations to their perverse deformity.

For the time being I will content myself with a consideration of their effects in the field of politics: my argument is that these three modes suffice to account for the full range of those monstrous dreams in which Great Politics comes to founder.

And since I have already suggested, elsewhere (with Christian Jambet, some time ago now), that the subject of Great Politics should be given the name *Angel*, so now I need three angelic names in order to designate the three aspects of the Fall towards which tumble our three deficient modes of subjectivation.

I will only mention, here, the Angel responsible for *real*isation [*réellisation*]. This is not an arbitrary choice: I have already shown how the homonymy that affects the word "real" proceeds *pros hen*, to use Aristotle's phrase (i.e. with respect to one underlying principle),[10] such that it indicates a certain privilege of R over the two other rings – as if, to put it crudely, R is "more true" [*plus vrai*] than S and I, in so far as it exists alongside them in a non-reciprocal manner (since R is precisely what remains when S and I are taken away). I think it is reasonable, then, to suppose that this privilege extends to the deficient mode of subjectivation that follows from the expansion of its agency [*instance*], and that this deficient mode relates to those that follow from expansion of the other two agencies in the same way that R itself relates to these latter. But what are we now to say of this Angel, this Angel who thus appears in a certain sense as "more veracious [*plus vérace*]" than the two other sinful Angels?

If, at the heart of the knot, R is the letter that demonstrates, with respect to whatever thing we refer to it, the fact that nothing can combine with nothing [*rien n'a avec rien puissance de mélange*],[11] so then *real*isation (the attribution of exclusive power to R) will amount to the inflated affirmation that I is only a delusion, that S is only a lie, that neither a "well-founded" world nor a well-made language exists. The Angel of *real*isation will be *the will* to bring every world back to the chaos that is its truth, to bring every community back to its essential dispersal, to dissolve every tie [*lien*], beginning with that tie by which a body is *a* body. The background against which this Angel detaches the liberation of the subject from any relation of authority is nothing other than the ruin of relation in general.

Like the Terror as described by Hegel,[12] its politics is a politics of absolute freedom, that is to say, of death.[13] And since, when all is said and done, this Angel will associate only with these dismembered bodies, I will call it the *Cannibal Angel*.[14]

Unlike the Angel of imaginarisation, which I call the *Barbarian Angel*, the Cannibal Angel does not "delude" [*ne "leurre" pas*], it does not dispel angelic hope by raising it up to satisfy some bombastic nonsense, by replacing the negativity in which Great Politics proceeds with the positivity of a *content*. On the contrary, it liberates negation from any determinacy [*determinité*] to which it might be applied; with it, negation is the negation of *nothing* – pure negation.

If we now try to draw, from the possible political existence of such a mode of subjectivation, some sort of theoretical understanding, we must first accept that this understanding will have no prognostic, therapeutic, or practical value. All the same, it does offer one insight, one only (and it is moral, rather than political), but it is one of no small importance: the necessity of integrating *self-love* with what, in *La Véracité*, I described as "pathological duty."[15] For the first form of non-relation [*non-rapport*] is not between self and other but between self and self. If then the *real*isation of non-relation has cannibalism as its deadly and inevitable effect, one will be forbidden first of all from making a meal of one's own body [*c'est de son propre corps, d'abord, que l'on s'interdira de faire repas*]. Rousseau was perfectly right: pity and self-love are both specular affections, and one can share something of the suffering of others only inasmuch as one affirms a certain tenderness for oneself. Self-pity, self-esteem, admiration of oneself in the mirror – so many forms of narcissistic indulgence, but equally, of what Aristotle (certainly the better guide, here, than Plato) called self-sufficiency or self-love, of that *philautia* without which there can be no *philia*. Self-love is self-mastery, an agreement with oneself to which we are led by another self: what a blunder, Aristotle teaches us, ever to have said *eros*.[16]

But again, we can reach no further conclusion beyond this.

From the outset, by inquiring about an *appearance*, I have accepted that we must suspend judgement as regards its truth, and have set aside all responses of both principle and fact (including facts that seem to claim some generality). And as I come to a close I remain in this suspense, and am satisfied to remain so.

As far as matters of fact are concerned, of course, many rebellions, many "explodings" of Great Politics, took place well before philosophy began and they will no doubt continue to take place after it has run its course. It is not for philosophy either to embrace or to reject the intention [*voeu*] behind Great Politics – philosophy has nothing at all to say about it *immediately*, and it is not upon these manifestations that it operates but upon the *discourses* that exhibit them (discourses directed to this or that end, ends which have nothing in common with those of philosophy). Philosophy is content if it manages to index and deploy or put into motion these discourses in such a way as to multiply them – and the more it multiplies, the more contented it is.[17]

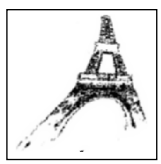
To be precise, this implies two separate points which, though they are certainly connected, for the sake of clarity I will distinguish as follows:

- If philosophy has nothing to say about Great Politics as such, this is simply because the one contradicts and excludes the other, and vice versa. We have often been urged to "have done with the political conception of the world," on the assumption that, by taking up philosophy we dismiss the hope that had inspired this conception. This, I believe, is to misunderstand the issue: what is at issue is not a matter of hope or despair, or of coming to terms with the way things are. It is a matter of changing the question, of asking no longer about the "failure" of Great Politics (for whatever reason, from whatever perspective) but about its *appearance*. This is the only aspect of the question that can be considered an object for philosophy. In other words: no political decision can be legitimately deduced from any philosophical position, and it would seem that the converse should be retained as a reliable criterion: any

orientation of thought which presumes that political decisions might be directly concluded from it is an orientation that is foreign to philosophy.

- Philosophy is not a set (however tightly connected) of dogmatic propositions concerning certain great objects peculiar to it, but a system of indexations [*système d'indexations*] to which various statements are subjected – statements that come from elsewhere, that are produced by other discourses, however tenuous these might be.[18] What this means is that, although philosophy assuredly exists only on account of its systems, these systems are in no sense positivities but are rather machines for producing negation – first and foremost a negation applied to themselves. In terms borrowed from Lacan, I would say (no doubt without his approval) that philosophy only conforms to its concept if it always represents the "not-all" to the universal propositions upon which nonetheless it necessarily depends.

In saying this, I remain persuaded that every true philosophy endures, at each point of its development, the test of scepticism.



notes

1 I am grateful to Sam Gillespie for his help with this translation, and to Antoine Hatzenberger, Sarah Hirschmuller and Alberto Toscano for their characteristically careful reviews of earlier versions of the text. [Translator's note.]

2 "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*: I see and approve the better course, but I follow the worse." To be sure, examination of Ovid's famous maxim is harmful, as Leibniz demonstrated, for all ethical considerations (cf. Leibniz, *Theodicy* and *New Essays*). My own concern, however, above ethics and the remedies it proposes, beyond the sphere of conscience or consciousness [*la conscience*], of its mistakes and misfortunes, is with the "madness" that the ageing Kant, the Kant of *The End of All Things* (1794), finds haunting our highest resolutions. Along the same lines, Comte admits that he does not fear our bad inclinations so much as our propensity to pursue the good.

3 If the problem only takes shape when it relates an intention to its consequences, and vice versa, it will no doubt seem surprising that in my previous note I chose to refer its formulation to Kant – but the text in question turns on the interest of hope (the interest that compels recognition of the third question that reason addresses to itself), rather than on the practical interest of morality.

4 From this perspective, it is clear that an *immediate* summoning of the "death drive" must be understood as a naturalist response.

5 Kant, "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" in *Conflict of the Faculties*, part two [7: 79–94]; cf. Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* [8: 17–31 – the pagination here refers, as is customary, to the standard German edition of Kant]. The term "abderitist" implies smug, self-satisfied or static. Kant may have based the term on the name of Protagoras of Abdera or, more plausibly, may have adapted it from Christoph Wieland's 1774 satirical novel about the pettiness of provincial German life, *Die Geschichte der Abderiten*. See Rudolf Eisler, *Kant-Lexicon*, eds. Anne-Dominique Balmès and Pierre Osmo (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 1. According to Bet Briggs, Wieland's novel was translated by Henry Christmas as *The Republic of Fools: Being the History of the State and People of Abdera in Thrace* (London: Allen, 1861). Cf. Briggs, "A Town Like Abdera," available online at <http://www.bikwil.zip.com.au/Vintage06/Abderites.html>. [Translator's note.]

6 The haste with which people rushed to conflate these questions (a haste to which I drew attention, at the time, in a number of texts) is what leads me to believe that the response to the problem that confused them must, in order to be convincing, include an anthropology as one of its moments. It was only by treating such an anthropology as a *moment*, however, that I went astray – for the empirical question, once clearly distinguished, obviously has its own pertinence, and for this reason a political anthropology of inverted rebellions [*des rébellions retournées*] remains highly desirable.

7 It would not be impossible, I think, to derive these modes from the procession of subjects that I outlined in my book *La Véracité*. But as things stand it seems simpler, and more convincing, and more economical, to refer to a doctrine whose power is already widely recognised.

8 Lardreau is referring to the late topological conception of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary (based on often cryptic applications of the "Borromean knot") that Lacan developed in his seminar of 1974–75, *Le Séminaire XXII: R.S.I.* (published in stages in the journal *Ornicar?*, nos. 2, 3, 4, 5 (1975)). [Translator's note.]

9 The French word *instance* is notoriously difficult to translate. In a psychoanalytic context it is usually translated as "agency" (Freud's *Instanz* – as in "the agency of the superego" or "the agency of censorship"), but readers should retain the resonance of its more general meanings: "authority" or "power," as well as "insistence." The title of Lacan's famous essay *L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient*, for example, has been translated both as "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (by Alan Sheridan) and as "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" (by Jan Miel). Both the German *Instanz* and the French *instance* also have prominent juridical connotations, as in *tribunal d'instance* or *affaire en instance*. [Translator's note.]

10 Lardreau is referring to what is sometimes called Aristotle's theory of focal equivocation, the idea that various distinct uses of a word are nevertheless all "related to one [*pros hen*]" fundamental meaning. For instance, the word "healthy" can refer to something that leads to good health (like a healthy diet), to something that indicates good health (like a healthy appetite), or simply to the general condition of health (like a healthy person): Aristotle's point is that the first two meanings of the word are derived from the third. The same logic applies, famously, to the meaning of the word being:

> There are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations of qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of some of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we may say even of non-being that it *is* non-being. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1003b1 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1584) ii)

[Translator's note.]

11 I am referring, of course, to the formulation of the *Sophist*. [Cf. Plato, *Sophist*, 252e: "either all will blend, or none, or some will and some will not" – the phrase Lardreau uses here, *puissance de mélange*, is rendered in English versions of the *Sophist* in terms of "blending," "combining" or "participating with." (Translator's note.)] In fact, I would quite happily characterise the three letters with reference to the three hypotheses advanced in this dialogue: I, "everything can combine with everything"; R, "nothing can combine with nothing"; S, "something can combine with something." I say this on condition, however, that like the various hypotheses of the *Parmenides*, these three are all true in turn, according to the order of their presentation, and that the truth itself is nothing other than their entwining [*leur nouage*].

12 Lardreau is referring to Hegel's description of absolute freedom as the moment, associated with the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, during which

> self-consciousness grasps the fact that its certainty of itself is the essence of all the spiritual "masses," or spheres, of the real as well as of the supersensible world, or conversely, that essence and actuality are consciousness's knowledge of itself […]. It comes into existence in such a way that each individual consciousness raises itself out of its allotted sphere, no longer finds its essence and its work in this particular sphere, but grasps itself as the Notion of will, grasps all spheres as the essence of this will, and therefore can only realise itself in a work which is a work of the whole. In this absolute freedom, therefore, all social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated are abolished; the individual consciousness that belonged to any such sphere, and willed and fulfilled itself in it, has put aside its limitation; its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work the universal work […]. In absolute freedom there was no reciprocal action between a consciousness that is immersed in the complexities of existence, or that sets itself specific aims and thoughts, and a valid external world, whether of reality or thought. (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) sects. 585–588, 594)

[Translator's note.]

13 Conversely, the watchword of imaginarisation is *Life* ("everything combining with everything …").

14 I am referring again to Kant here, in particular to his 1797 *Doctrine of Right* [*Rechtslehre*]. To be sure, what is at issue in this text concerns only the risks that accompany the directly sexual use of the other's body, but if it is true that every relation [*rapport*] is ultimately grounded in the sexual non-relation, so then the extension that I am giving to the concept here is not illegitimate. [Lardreau is thinking, of course, of Lacan's insistence that "there can be no sexual relationship [*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*]" (Lacan, *Le Séminaire XX: Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 17). (Translator's note.)]

15 To tell the truth, my own symptom, along with things that I still retained from my formative years, prevented me from accepting this necessity at the time.

16 Lardreau is referring to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 8–11. [Translator's note.]

17 The French reads: "*[la philosophie] est contente si elle parvient à les faire tourner devant un système d'indexations qui les multiplie – et qui lui plaira d'autant mieux qu'il multiplie davantage*." [Translator's note.]

18 In *L'Exercice différé de la philosophie* (1999), in order to account for a certain regime of the history of philosophy, I took on the task of showing how philosophy is sometimes able to treat its own statements as if they came from elsewhere.

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