RELATION

The repercussions of cultures, whether in symbiosis or in conflict—in a polka, we might say, or in a laghia*—in domination or liberation, opening before us an unknown forever both near and deferred, their lines of force occasionally divined, only to vanish instantly. Leaving us to imagine their interaction and shape it at the same time: to dream or to act.*

The deconstruction of any ideal relationship one might claim to define in this interaction, out of which ghouls of totalitarian thinking might suddenly reemerge.

The position of each part within this whole: that is, the acknowledged validity of each specific Plantation yet at the same time the urgent need to understand the hidden order of the whole—so as to wander there without becoming lost.

The thing recused in every generalization of an absolute, even and especially some absolute secreted within this imaginary construct of Relation: that is, the possibility for each one at every moment to be both solidary and solitary there.

The Relative and Chaos

We were circling around the thought of Chaos, sensing that the way Chaos itself goes around is the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by "chaotic" and that it opens onto a new phenomenon: Relation, or totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever.

There is a revealing correspondence between the philosophies secreted by the sciences in the West and the conceptions commonly held about or imposed upon cultures and their relations. During the period when positivism was triumphant, culture (and not yet cultures) was conceived of as monolithic, culture existing wherever the refinements of civilization have led to humanism.* When conceived of in this manner, culture is presented as purely abstract, the very essence of this movement toward an ideal. Those who attain it are responsible for this evolution and its pilots. They teach the rest of the world. Montaigne's relativism is forgotten, shoved through a trapdoor and stifled for more than three centuries. It required the illustration of the notion of the relative in the scientific theory of Relativity for an awareness of the relativism of cultures to prevail.[1]

What we commonly grasp of Einsteinian thought is this

*Positivism and humanism have in common the fact that both end up imposing the reality of an "ideal object" that they have initially defined as value.

simple connection between Relativity and the principle of the relative. All the rest lies in ambush within the bastion of theorems. Substituting or compensating for its lack of direct access to what Einstein said, the public has mythologized the scientist. This mythmaking is a sign of the extent to which the relative is powerfully present for us. To the point at which the formula $E = mc^2$ has become a common place (or commonplace)[2] that we use advisedly, that is for its symbolic freight, without being sure we really appreciate its content.

What part of this theory do we retain concerning the subject at hand, when we are not limited by our infirmities as nonspecialists? That there is no thought of the absolute but also that the Relation of uncertainty postulated by Heisenberg is not perhaps the basis for an irreversible probabilism. (Are "primary" particles subjected to chance?) For Einstein Relativity is not purely relative. The universe has a "sense" that is neither chance nor necessity: a geometer god (the same as Newton's), in any case a "powerful and mysterious reason"—and not, therefore, a malicious spirit, as in Descartes—provides us with a riddle to decipher. This puzzle (something to be divined through intuition and verified through experimentation) "guarantees" the interactive dynamics of the universe and of our knowledge of it.

Experimental thought has its basis in this interaction and "guarantees" in turn that the puzzle will not be taken into realms of the impossible (something will always be there to grasp) nor into realms of the absolute (something will always remain to be grasped).

The totality within which Relativity is exerted and to which it is applied, through the workings of the mind, is not totalitarian, therefore: not imposed a priori, not fixed as an absolute. And, consequently, for the mind, it is neither a restrictive dogmatism nor the skepticism of probabilist thought.

Consent to cultural relativism ("each human culture has value in its own milieu, becoming equivalent to every other in the ensemble") accompanied the spreading awareness of,

and adherence or at least habituation to, the idea of Relativity.

This cultural relativism has not always come without a tinge of essentialism, which has colored even the concepts that contributed to challenging the domination of conquering cultures. The idea of *one* Africa, conceived of as undivided, and the theory of Negritude (among French speakers) are two examples of this frequently debated for that very reason.

Furthermore, this relativism in turn has been regarded as falling into the category of a "golden mean." Here diversity exists among cultures but does not prevent the formation of hierarchies among civilizations. Or, at the very least, an ascent (regular or intermittent) toward the transparency of a world—or model— that is universal. And, consequently, for the mind there is neither totalitarian ethnocentrism nor the anarchy of a tabula rasa. Montaigne's invaluable idea was adapted to suit the tendentious drone of this new version of humanism. This form of relativism has no pertinence to the relative.

Just as Relativity in the end postulated a Harmony to the universe, cultural relativism (Relativity's timid and faltering reflection) viewed and organized the world through a global transparency that was, in the last analysis, reductive. This cultural "Society of Nations" could not withstand the maelstrom.

But the dogmatic feeling of superiority and the clever maneuvers of false relativism were succeeded by an elegant disenchantment, the acute sense of the futility of it all. If everything in this maelstrom was equal in fact to everything else, if the realization of an Earth—totality opened onto chaos—what was the use? Pervading what should have been an exhilarating arrival at totality was a flavor of declining empire, reinforced, perhaps, after World War II by the antagonistic presence of the two Roman empires of our time, the United States and the Soviet Union. Both were driven by the same naive belief, frequently confirmed by reality, in their preeminence over other populations. And you might imag-

ine each of these powers, which, having plentiful wealth, did not have to torment themselves so, going around muttering to themselves, "Tonight Lucullus will be eating at Lucullus's table."

Meanwhile, poor nations, by their very eruption, had made it possible for new ideas to be born: ideas of otherness, of difference, of minority rights, of the rights of peoples. These ideas, however, seemed only to dust the surface of the swirling magma. It was not clear how anyone could conceive of the global dereliction of humanities meeting and confronting one another in the spaces and times of the planet.

Then, bit by bit, an idea came together from scientific intuitions: it was possible to study Chaos without succumbing to a vertigo of disillusion over its endless transformations.

Let us venture two of the directions in which the strengths of science either operate or become exasperated.

First, there is the directly technological application, which tends to reactivate a "projective linearity" and sets things up, if not for getting to "the bottom" of the matter (possibly something it will never achieve), at least for discovery or conquest, which are one and the same, of the galactic spaces. Technological thought is clear about the fact that it will never exhaust the yield of the universe but doesn't let this scare it off. On the contrary, it is stymied by the mystery of the infinitely small (of the "prime element"), dreading the discovery there of an infinitely receding limit.

The Unified Field Theory constructed by Einstein attempted to bridge these two dimensions of the universe and define its undifferentiated unity. But, for the time being, "dominant" scientific thought has apparently renounced either supporting or delving into this theory. It seems, rather, to have returned to the comfortable empiricism that provides immense technological power, having decided to devote itself principally to "exploration," and preferably in the realm of the infinitely large.

This tendency, morever, has become increasingly based on

attempts to imagine or to prove a "creation of the world" (the Big Bang), which has always been the "basis" of the scientific project. The old obsession with filiation carves out a new adornment for itself. Linearity ties in. The idea of God is there. And the notion of legitimacy reemerges. A science of conquerors who scorn or fear limits; a science of conquest.

The other direction, which is not one, distances itself entirely from the thought of conquest; it is an experimental meditation (a follow-through) of the process of relation, at work in reality, among the elements (whether primary or not) that weave its combinations. A science of inquiry. This "orientation" then leads to following through whatever is dynamic, the relational, the chaotic—anything fluid and various and moreover uncertain (that is, ungraspable) yet fundamental in every instance and quite likely full of instances of invariance.

It is true that each of these two tendencies relays and reinforces each other. But the first perpetuates an arrowlike projection, whereas the second, perhaps, recreates the processes of circular nomadism. It is also true that dispossessed regions, countries in the throes of absolute poverty, are isolated from participation. But, though they don't "count" for conquering science (except as a ruthless reserve of primary material), their presence constitutes another material, the one covered by inquiring science. The subject matter of this science is *chaos-monde,* one of the modes of Chaos.

This is not a passive participation. Passivity plays no part in Relation. Every time an individual or community attempts to define its place in it, even if this place is disputed, it helps blow the usual way of thinking off course, driving out the now weary rules of former classicisms, making new "follow-throughs" to *chaos-monde* possible.

The science of Chaos renounces linearity's potent grip and, in this expanse/extension, conceives of indeterminacy as a fact that can be analyzed and accident as measurable. By rediscovering the abysses of art or the interplay of various aes-

thetics, scientific knowledge thus develops one of the ways poetics is expressed, reconnecting with poetry's earlier ambition to establish itself as knowledge.

One can see why philosophies issuing from different "stages" of science have driven successively "established" ideas of cultures and their entanglements. It is because scientific ideas always presuppose generalization (unconsciously influenced by the metaphysics from which they freed themselves) and are suspicious of it in each instance (as every poetics in the world inspires us to be). They have finally been able to understand generalization from the angle of generality, abandoning filiation's linearity for the surplus of expansiveness. This is how the evolution of cultures works.

In expanse/extension the forms of *chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) are unforeseeable and foretellable. We have not yet begun to calculate their consequences: the passive adoptions, irrevocable rejections, naive beliefs, parallel lives, and the many forms of confrontation or consent, the many syntheses, surpassings, or returns, the many sudden outbursts of invention, born of impacts and breaking what has produced them, which compose the fluid, turbulent, stubborn, and possibly organized matter of our common destiny.

Is it meaningful, pathetic, or ridiculous that Chinese students have been massacred in front of a cardboard reproduction of the Statue of Liberty? Or that, in a Romanian house, hated portraits of Ceauşescu have been replaced by photographs cut from magazines of characters in the television series "Dallas"? Simply to ask the question is to imagine the unimaginable turbulence of Relation.

Yes, we are just barely beginning to conceive of this immense friction. The more it works in favor of an oppressive order, the more it calls forth disorder as well. The more it produces exclusion, the more it generates attraction. It standardizes—but at every node of Relation we will find callouses of resistance. Relation is learning more and more to go beyond judgments into the unexpected dark of art's upsurg-

ings. Its beauty springs from the stable and the unstable, from the deviance of many particular poetics and the clairvoyance of a relational poetics. The more things it standardizes into a state of lethargy, the more rebellious consciousness it arouses.

We will not gain access to this turbulence through the same means employed by theoreticians and students of Chaos. We do not have at our disposal computers capable of following the flow of cultures, the poetic nodes, the dynamics of languages, the phases of cultures in confrontation. Should we hope that our imaginary construct of Relation might someday be "confirmed" in formulas we can read on the monitor screen? Can accident, which is the joy of poetics, be tamed through circuits? Might it be possible to relate the turbulences of *chaos-monde* in this way (in and through analysis by instruments) to the turbulences of Chaos? Then what would be the consequences of such an intrusion?

Every "virus" (every accident), according to Jacques Coursil, is injected into a computer system; but it would also be possible for it to have been secreted by the system itself. In this case it would be proof that the system "thinks," that, in short, accident is part of its nature. This outcome would also be invaluable for safeguarding freedoms, the guarantee that no Law could ever be founded on such a system. What's more, taking a wild tack with this hypothesis, the virus would manifest the fractal nature of the system; it would be the sign of the intrusion of Chaos, the irremediable indicator, that is, of the asynchronous nature of the system. This is how one might imagine this other unimaginable event: the computer, the privileged instrument for the analysis of Chaos, would be invaded and inhabited by the latter. Chaos, turning back around upon itself, would shut the doors. It would be God. (At least, if no one invented other instruments of investigation that could not be contaminated by their object.) The stubborn determination of analytic thought makes it possible to continue infinitely this perspective of deferral. Really, how-

ever, it is only the human imaginary that cannot be contaminated by its objects. Because it alone diversifies them infinitely yet brings them back, nonetheless, to a full burst of unity. The highest point of knowledge is always a poetics.