Paganism and Barbarism in the French Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century (Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau)

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Abstract: The present study attempts to show in which cases the barbarism discussed and sometimes openly advocated by the French philosophers of the 18th century (Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau) relates back to some pagan habits and realities for mystically-romantic and for nostalgically-instinctual reasons and in which cases it has to do with rudimentary and bloodthirsty uses of reason. As these thinkers ignited the first precious and powerful sparks in the direction of a historical recuperation of the phenomenological and aesthetic roots of man, our material represents an attempt to explain the political and historical phenomenon which brought back to the table the discussion concerning the cultural origins of Europe and which resurrected the pagan fascinations and fears within the cultural imaginary of the coming epochs.

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1. *Introduction*: The Philosophers of the French Revolution

Although history did not record Diderot, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau for a direct participation in the bloody events of the French Revolution, their ideas influenced the learned active political men of the time – doctors, lawyers, merchants and bankers – that is, those who defined the actual public leadership and who were more aware than the king and his court of the difficulties of the peasants, but also and most of all, of the social and economic force that the downtrodden and oppressed ones could embody, if triggered emotionally and given a realistic social trajectory. Unlike the peasants who were more or less illiterate and forced to work to exhaustion just to be able to feed themselves; the four philosophers could indulge in introspections and seize by means of theories the coming inevitable discharge of repressed energies (they had the necessary time and intellectual means to think their

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historical situation and to create the conceptual premises for some logically inevitable changes in society).

Their most important contribution remains perhaps the elaborate way in which they approached two complex *concepts*: that of *liberation from imperial structures* and a corresponding or subsequent issue of *pagan savagery and exuberance*. They addressed these issues from political, sociological, philosophical, historical and theological angles, while trying to operate directly at the level of the *status quo* of the holders of authority and tradition – in order to deconstruct the idea of "forbidenness" and to reveal the imposture of the power relations on which political authority was built and through which it was sustained.

What truly unites their writings is perhaps one of the strangest possible combination: an almost "religious" feeling of devotion towards reason (and a self-imposed belief in the power of this reason to create heavenly places here on Earth), combined atypically with an exuberant (romantic, intoxicating) pagan lust for the purity of freedom. Their ideas about how freedom should be gained and about the real meaning that should accompany such a state of mind went hand-in-hand with a confidence in the transformative power of instincts. Their revolutionary fervour was savoured by the medium of a deviant socio-melancholy – we say "deviant" in an epistemological sense, because it was, after all, a politically induced and sustained pensiveness, one roughly divorced from the classic romantic (politically-disinterested) definition of melancholy.

2. Montesquieu's free and enslaved conquerors

The Spirit of the Laws contains a lengthy historical meditation around the ways in which the values and the obsessions of the Roman Empire got or could get reflected, assimilated and transformed in the light of modern reason and philosophical experience.

In order to understand the implication of the notion of rebellion within an imperial structure, as part of a resurrected pagan spirit and lust, we must go back as far as the times of the Roman Empire and see the relations between the dominators and the incoming populations, into what was considered to be "the civilized (urban) areas".

According to Henry Bradley the tribes of the Goths played a key-role in the fall of the Roman Empire because of their strong dissidence as manifestation of a vivid identity, and of a fighting and daring spirit. As untameable conquerors, when they sought refuge in the Roman Empire they could not accept the price that the Romans demanded in exchange for having given them shelter and secure conditions for life: the dismembering of their familial nuclei:

> "Orders were sent to the Roman governors on the banks of the Danube to make preparations for bringing the Visigoths across the river, and when a sufficient number of boats had been collected, the great immigration began. Day after day, from early morning till far into the night, the broad river was covered with passing vessels, into which the Goths had crowded so eagerly that many of them sank on the passage, and all on board were lost. At first the Romans tried to count the people as they landed, but the numbers were so vast that the attempt had to be given up. (...) If the Goths at first felt any

> thankfulness to the Romans for giving them a safe refuge from their savage enemies, their gratitude was soon turned into fierce anger when they got to know that their children were to be taken from them, and sent away into distant parts of the empire. The reason for this cruel action was that the Romans thought the Goths would keep quiet when they knew that their children might be killed if a rebellion took place; but it only filled the minds of the barbarians with a wild longing for revenge."[1]

And the Goths took their rebellion so far that they ended up crowning their kings in Rome itself, and imposing their laws on the whole of Southern Europe. Having in view this historical aspect, we could say that the concept of Gothic culture (as part of the 18th century revolutionary spirit that animated the whole Europe) is built around the idea of *rebellion* (though, as we shall see, quite often rationalization itself is also condemned by the conservative "factions" as being a venal form of rebellion), or that it contains strong rebellious ideatic stems as inherited from the Forefathers (the Goths) of this trend in the European history of the empires.

In the historical evolution of Europe, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the second most important episode of rebellion (from the point of view of its cultural effects), destructuring from within an otherwise overwhelming imperial structure, was the French Revolution. And it is no coincidence that Charles de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu, one of the most modern voices of the 18th century and a major source of inspiration for all future ways of thinking the sense of history, when advocating the cause of a massive and reviving re-organization of France, went back, for reasons of exemplarity, to the episode with the Goths.

In a fascinating chapter from his *The Spirit of the Laws*, entitled "That, when the peoples of Northern Asia and those of northern Europe conquered, the effects of their conquests were not the same", Montesquieu proved an unprecedented power of understanding the dynamics that ensure the functioning of the progressive engines of history, showing that a *savage conquest* (be it in the form of a rebellion from within an empire or of an outer invasion of an imperial domain) *as such* does not and cannot exists, that it can only be culturally acknowledged if placed on an incisive vector by means of a political determination.

Different political determinations establish different types of vectors of infiltration. In this respect Montesquieu compares the Asian conquests with those of the Vikings, claiming that when the invaders seize a structure *as slaves*, they only install there a new type of slavery (basically perpetuating and even aggrandizing or turning truly malignant their social oppressive cell), while, on the contrary, when they seize it as free men, they create the very conditions for equality of chances and for progressive meritocratic development. And, according to Montesquieu, the Goths knew about the Vikings and their ways and, inside the Roman imperial space[2], they turned the Nordic model into a law of being and, mostly, into *a law of becoming* of the conscious and entrepreneurial human subject:

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[1] Henry Bradley, *The Goths From The Earliest Times To The End Of The Gothic Dominion In Spain* (Whitefish - Montana: Kessinger Publishing , 2005), 66–67.

[2] It is well known that by the time the Vikings (in their strong identitary countenance and skillful enterprises) entered into the Mediterranean, what was left of the Roman Empire hired

> "The peoples of northern Europe have conquered as free men; the peoples of northern Asia have conquered as slaves and have been victorious only for a master. The reason is that the Tartar people, Asia's natural conquerors, have become slaves themselves. They constantly conquer southern Asia, they form empires; but the part of the conquering nation that remains in this country is subject to a greater master, who is despotic in the south, who also wants to be so in the north and who, with arbitrary power over the conquered subjects, claims it also over the conquering subjects.(…). The spirit of Europe has always been contrary to these mores; and what the peoples of Asia have always called punishment, the peoples of Europe have always called gross offence. When the Tartars destroyed the Greek empire, the established servitude and despotism in the conquered countries; when the Goths conquered the Roman Empire, they founded monarchy and liberty everywhere. I do not know if the famous Rudbeck, who in *Atlantica* has so praised Scandinavia, has mentioned the great prerogative that should put the nations inhabiting it above all the peoples of the world: it is that they have been the source of European liberty, that is, of almost all of it that there is today among men.
>
> The Goth Jordanes has called northern Europe the manufactory of the human species. I shall rather call it the manufactory of the instruments that break the chains forged in the south. It is there that are formed the valiant nations who go out of their own countries to destroy tyrants and slaves and to teach men that, as nature has made them equal, reason can make them dependent only for the sake of their happiness."[1]

And it is not at all accidentally that in other sections of his book Montesquieu insists as well on the Gothic model of dismantling the Roman political organization and of slowly creating social equilibrium and equal opportunities within the Great Empire:

> "The Goths who conquered Spain scattered throughout the country and soon were very weak. They made three noteworthy regulations: they abolished

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them as mercenaries and there was no need for any kind of savage dissension between the two civilizations. Here, the most significant case remains perhaps that of the Hagia Sophia building in Istanbul, Turkey. A former Orthodox patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, and now a museum, Hagia Sophia contains on its marble parapets a series of runic inscriptions, most probably engraved there by such Viking mercenaries serving the Eastern Roman Empire. The most famous such inscription is the one that refers to a Norse character called Halfdan. Yet, apart from the name itself it remains pretty illegible and open to speculations. According to Elisabeth Svärdström ("Runorna i Hagia Sofia", Fornvännen 65 [1970], 247–49) it seems to say something that could equal our modern formula "Halfdan was here". We could conclude that such peripheral historical contingencies remain "mere" episodes of mercenary "attachment" between the Romans and the Vikings, a relation that would pretty much fit the contemporary American label of "soldier of fortune" – if we are to consider both the personal gain and love of adventure that motivated the alliance.

[1] Charles Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Editors and Translators: Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 282–283.

> the former custom that prohibited them from allying themselves with the Romans through marriage, they established that all those freed from the fisc would go to war on pain of being reduced to servitude; they ordered that each Goth would lead to war and arm a tenth of his slaves. This number was not very large by comparison with the number who remained. In addition, these slaves led to war by their master did not make up a separate body; they were in the army and remained, so to speak, in the family."[1]

We can see that Montesquieu praises the pagan initiative and independent entrepreneurial spirit,[2] while attributing the human savagery to former slaves who can't see beyond their social conditioning and who, when they get to be kings and other types of rulers, by virtue of the most brute inertias of life, keep on perpetuating and reinventing the severe harm that was previously inflicted on them. A pagan in a state of nature, according to him, is always an inventor, an adventurer, a conqueror and even a civilizer.

3. Diderot 's resurrected use of the human entrails as tool for hanging and as chain of historical consequences

Denis Diderot remains perhaps the most fascinating and viscerally-authentic case of paganism – though one never noticed as such, because of the heavy accent placed by his exegetes on his encyclopaedic spirit and on his liberal use of rationalism.

His discourse from his extremely complex lifework entitled *Encyclopédie* (*Encyclopedia*) mostly challenged the ecclesiastical institution and its influence upon other social and political forms of organization, identifying as the heart of the problem of the various forms of social slavery the doctrine that stated the so called "divine" right of a prince to hold power over others (as a "true" reflection of "God's will").

He advocated a religion and a political choice based on *reason* (*a*) and on *personal freedoms and initiatives* (*b*):

> (*a*)"All things must be examined, debated, investigated without exception and without regard for anyone's feelings...We must ride roughshod over all these ancient puerilities, overturn the barriers that reason never erected..."[3]

> (*b*)"The eclectic is a philosopher who, by riding roughshod over prejudice, tradition, antiquity, universal consent, authority, in a word, everything that subjugates the mass of minds, dares to think for himself, goes back to the most clear and general principles, examines and discusses them, while admitting only what can be proven by experience and reason. After having analyzed all philosophical systems without any deference or partiality, he constructs a personal and domestic one that belongs to him. I say *a personal and domestic*

[1] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 256–257.
[2] In his case, we could claim to have come into contact with ideas and theories that would pretty much fit today's modern etiquette of "entrepreneurial conquest".
[3] Denis Diderot, *The Encyclopedia: Selections*, translated and edited by Stephen Gendzier (New York: Harper, 1967), 93.

> *philosophy* because the ambition of the eclectic is to be the disciple of the human race rather than its teacher, to reform himself rather than others, to know rather than to teach the truth."[1]

As it can be observed from the lines above, with Diderot it begins the hectic practice of reason, in an attempt to launch a web of general influence in this direction. Yet Diderot did not overstep the functions or the roles of processes of rationalization, maintaining himself in a constant liberal stream of consciousness, one which honours him even today among the free-thinkers.

His preference for a personal and domestic philosophy places him among the pioneering voices (advocates) of a return to a primordial (archaic) form of reason and of self-determination, controversially labelled later as "state of nature". As it can be seen in the quotation above, like the most modern pagan thinkers and artists, he encourages a return to a more intense and endurant form of wisdom and of emotionality, one better connected to the a-temporal essentials and constants of human existence, and also one that has always truly sustained all continuities and reliable precious persistencies amidst the fluxes and refluxes of human historical intentionalities (see in the above quotation the passages where he states that man should go "back to the most clear and general principles", and that he should "know rather than (...) teach the truth").

A fascinating chapter within his writings remains his defence of the pagan virtues of the Roman god Aius Locutius, where he denounces the vulgar and aggressively-irreverent agitators and critics of other peoples' faith and sacred inner areas. Diderot proposes a model within which reason, far from undermining anything, strengthens and sustains the religious feeling ("those who really think know what to believe") and makes true believers (complex believers, not mere followers) immune to cheap attacks. We could say that Diderot shyly offers the ancient pagan society as model of tolerance:

> "Aius Locutius, *God of speech*, whom the Romans honored by this extraordinary name. As it is also necessary to hold one's tongue, they also had the god of silence. When the Gauls were about to invade Italy, a voice coming from the wood of Vesta was heard to cry out: 'If you do not raise the walls of the city, it will be taken.' This advice was disregarded. The Gauls arrived and Rome was taken. After their retreat, the oracle was recalled and an altar was raised for him under the name that we are discussing. A temple was then constructed in Rome at the very place where he had made himself heard for the first time. Cicero says in the second volume of his study *On Divination* that this god spoke when he was not known by anyone but kept quiet the moment he had a temple and altars. The god of speech became mute as soon as he was worshiped. It is difficult to reconcile the singular veneration that the pagans had for their gods with the patience that they also had for the discourses of certain philosophers. Did the Christians whom they persecuted so much say anything stronger than we can read in Cicero? The

[1] Diderot, *The Encyclopedia: Selections*, 86.

> books *On Divination* are merely irreligious treatises. But what an impression must have been made on the people by certain pieces of oratory in which the gods were constantly invoked and called forth to witness events, in which Olympian threats were recalled to mind-in short, where the very existence of the pagan deities was presupposed by orators who had written a host of philosophical essays treating the gods and religion as mere fables!(...) Since it will always be impossible to prevent men from thinking and writing, would it not be desirable to allow them to live among us as they did among the ancients? The works of incredulity are not to be feared, for they only affect the masses and the faith of simple people. Those who really think know what to believe; and a pamphlet will certainly not lead them off a path which they have carefully chosen and follow by preference. It is not by trivial and absurd reasoning that a philosopher can be persuaded to abandon his God. Impiety is therefore not to be feared except for those who let themselves be guided."[1]

If we analyze deeper the meaning of this passage, we see that what Diderot really emphasizes is the ancient peoples' capacity to erect *inside themselves* temples of humane virtues and of gratitude towards the benevolent superior forms of energy, inner buildings which make them self-confident, strong and reliable people. As such, they did not react in aggression to Cidero's and to other philosophers' misplaced criticism, as they were secure enough in their *faith* and in their *reason – a two-pan balance* which functioned in a decent way in the epoch and which caused no need for religious wars.

But is this rather pastoral and pleasantly (elegantly)-entrepreneurial resurrected old wisdom the real manifestation of Diderot's pagan appetite? Or it is but the sociably-acceptable face of Janus – that of the appeased, settled and ripened melancholies?

In order to answer this double-question one should remember that, at Diderot, a humane religiousness is possible only in the context of a *total extraction of the religious feeling* from the grasp of both the state apparatus and the church – an idea illustrated by the French thinker in a radical and powerful language which, consciously or subconsciously, goes back to the savage (and also somehow superstitious) imaginary of the old tribes:

"Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest."

We think that it is here where Diderot's real and pungent paganism reveals itself. The sentence was read in a variety of classic cultural codes (always within the acknowledged systemic webs of references) by sociologists, philosophers and political theorists – but never taken for an instinctively incisive pagan statement, *one* with strong historical references in what concerns the physical ritualistic aspects invoked by the author.

[1] Ibid., 57–58.

3.1. The classic interpretations of Diderot's dream of kings strangled with the entrails of priests

The tradition of *liberalism* assumed Diderot's weird statement as a radical but strongly metaphoric (endowed with an intense symbolism) expression of our desire to gain a Free Will, one that should operate beyond the grasp of the morally-biased authorities (the state institutions and the Church). We are talking here about a will resulting from a genuinely independent thinking style, one based on a creative semantics and, in our vision, one bordering on Karl Mannheim's free-floating social intelligentsia or "socially unattached intelligentsia".[1]

The *anarchists* still use it as a manifesto for the musealization of the places of worship and governance and for the elimination of the power seekers from the public scene (because "absolute power corrupts absolutely"); while the *atheists* see in such a line an opportunity for their deconstructionist and, in most of the cases, left-wing propaganda (though the statement was written during the Enlightenment as a general warning against the oppressive politicized forms of social cohesion).

Yet the most credible interpretation circulating today through the agency of the discourses of the universities is the one belonging to the sphere of *political philosophy* – one which claims that what Diderot actually wanted to stress when uttering this controversial statement, was an extremely acute need to separate the government from the Church. Regarded as radicalization of the necessity to keep the religious and the civic-minded individuals away from each-other's influence and to

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[1] The idea as such is perfectly explained by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their *The Social Construction of Reality*, as a way of transcending one's social position, class-interests and cultural conditioning through an accumulation of perspectives on the same subject – an increase in information, in concepts, in representations and in ideas which helps the object of study become clearer, or reveal itself as an active transformer and adapter within the field of research known as "the sociology of knowledge". Such clarity leads to concrete understandings based on relationism and not on relativism or isolationism: "With the general concept of ideology the level of the sociology of knowledge is reached – the understanding that no human though (…) is immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context. By this expansion of the theory of ideology Mannheim sought to abstract its central problem from the context of political usage, and to treat it as a general problem of epistemology and historical sociology. (…) He coined the term 'relationism' (in contradistinction to 'relativism') to denote the epistemological perspective of his sociology of knowledge – not a capitulation of thought before the socio-historical relativities, but a sober recognition that knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain position. (…) Be this as it may, Mannheim believed that ideologizing influences, while they could not be eradicated completely, could be mitigated by the systematic analysis of as many as possible of the varying socially grounded positions. In other words, the object of thought becomes progressively clearer with this accumulation of different perspectives on it. This is to be the task of the sociology of knowledge, which thus is to become an important aid in the quest for any correct understanding of human events. Mannheim believed that different social groups vary greatly in their capacity thus to transcend their own narrow position. He placed his major hope in the 'socially unattached intelligentsia' (*freischwebende Intelligenz*, a term derived from Alfred Weber), a sort of interstitial stratum that he believed to be relatively free of class interests." Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 10.

prevent an apocalyptic fusion between their spirits poisoned with sick devotions, such a declaration signals the main obsession of the late 18th century European societies and their understanding of the freeing of the ways to progress – in other words, a premonition[1] that managed to materialize itself in an overwhelming zeitgeist of both the 18th century and of the centuries to come.

3.2. The literal pagan interpretations of Diderot's dream of kings strangled with the entrails of priests

Yet, in the logic of our present study, we will regard all these interpretations and appropriations of Diderot's controversial words about priests, kings and entrails as obsolete and as purely philosophical and aesthetical decipherments. In our view, all the exegetic directions mentioned previously interpreted Diderot's statement metaphorically, allegorically and in any possible way that allows one to avoid crossing the t's and dotting the i's, that is, to regard the words for what they really (actually) say: "*the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest*". This line advocates and resurrects an old pagan ritualistic use of the entrails: *making the most of their elasticity and endurance when used as ropes*.

And historians – especially historians of religion such as Mircea Eliade – have documented the use of animal and human intestines as ropes as early as the times of the Roman Empire, from the first to the fourth centuries AD, within what remained known until today as the "Roman Mithraism" – a *mystery religion* (Mithraic Mysteries) tributary to Persian or Zoroastrian sources (inspired from the cult of an Old Persian god Mithra who was always represented as a predatory force renowned for his act of bull-slaying [tauroctony] as a forced and bloodily-invigorating forging of human life against the overwhelming background made of grandiose primordial presences [symbolized through the fierce image of the bull]).

We are discussing here the case of the Roman Mithraism as opposed to Christianity because, as an ultimately elitist and military cult, this religion is regarded by the researchers of the diachronic evolutions of cultures as the strongest historical pagan alternative to Christianity: "When the Mysteries of the Mithra are discussed, it appears inevitable to quote Ernest Renan's famous sentence: 'If Christianity had been halted in its growth by some mortal illness, the world would have been Mithraist'(Marc Aurele, p. 579)."[2]

The community of the mystai would use entrails as an important ritualistic piece at the very (triumphant) end of their sophisticated trail of symbolic acts: they used chicken-intestines whose role was to both reflect the captivity and the disorientation of the neophyte and to provide the opportunity for the apparition of a redeemer in the form of a liberator. What resulted at the end of a tumultuous symbolic display of ravenous energies awaiting and struggling to embody

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[1] We call it "premonition" when relating it to the inseparability that still exists in the Muslim between state and church world with dreadful consequences.

[2] Mircea Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas, Volume 2: From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, translated by Willard R. Trask (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 326.

themselves and to reach a historical form of selfness was order, an order symbolized through the image of the soldier and of the lion that conquers the previous chaos:

> "(…) so we may conclude that the scenario of Mithraic initiation did not include ordeals suggesting death and resurrection. Before their initiation the postulants undertook on oath (sacramentum) to keep the secret of the Mysteries. A passage in Saint Jerome (Ep. 107, ad Laetam) and a number of inscriptions have supplied us with the nomenclature of the seven grades of initiation: Crow (corax), Bride (nymphus), Soldier (miles), Lion (leo), Persian (Perses), Courier of the Sun (heliodromus), and Father (pater). Admission to the first grades was granted even to children from the age of seven; presumably they received a certain religious education and learned chants and hymns. The community of the mystai was divided into two groups: the 'servitors' and the 'participants', the latter group being made up of initiates of the grade of leo or higher. We know nothing of the initiations into the different grades. (…) the Christian apologists refer to a 'baptism', which presumably introduced the neophyte into his new life. 'Probably this rite was reserved for a neophyte preparing him for the grade miles.' We know that he was offered a crown, but the mystes had to refuse it, saying that Mithra 'was his only crown'. He was then marked on the forehead with a redhot iron (Tertullian, De proem. haeret. 40) or purified with a burning torch (Lucian, Menippus 7). In the initiation into the grade of leo, honey was poured on the candidate's hands and his tongue was smeared with it. Now honey was the food of the blessed and of the newborn infants. According to a Christian author of the fourth century, the candidates' eyes were blindfolded, and a frantic troop then surrounded them, some imitating the cawings of crows and the beating of their wings, others roaring like lions. Some candidates, their hands tied with the intestines of chickens, had to jump over a ditch filled with water. Then someone appeared with a sword, cut the intestines, and announced himself as the liberator."[1]

The entrails symbolize and condense within these rituals the whole history of man's previous incapacity to disrupt his flesh (and his will and his spirit) from the apocalyptically-bulging protoplasmic and proto-historical sarcoid mass of the all-absorbing chaos (a sinisterly placentary threatening presence). Their endurance and elasticity as well as their dramatically-reversed biological presence constitute aspects that turned them into a total symbol of the acts of seizing, of immobilizing and of devouring. A rope made of intestines becomes a devastating image of the defeat (in the case of the victim) and an over-visceral allegory of engulfing and of conquering through constriction (in the case of the victor): it is as if the intestines acquired a life of their own, because they didn't want to wait for the mouth and for the other organs to provide them with food. To this end they got out of the body and assumed the role of an attacking snake (or of the human hand, for that matter).

[1] Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas, Volume 2: From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, 324–325.

In the following centuries it was on the Germanic and Baltic mystical lands that the ritual got re-actualized but also drastically radicalized. According to the historians Jacob Grimm and Johannes Voigt, the pagans in these parts of Europe no longer used intestines of chickens but human entrails: they punished their adversaries by using the victim's own intestines, after disembowelment, as rope with which he/she was "woodened" into a tree.

It is this real use of human intestines that echoes in Diderot's words and resurrected pagan imaginary:

> "From the 15th century, a number of ordinances are retained that threaten with a terrible punishment for those who stripped off the bark of a standing tree in the common woods. A typical wording is found in the 1401 ordinance from Oberursel[1]:
> 'und wo der begriffen wird, der einen stehenden baum schälet, dem wäre gnad nützer dan recht u. wann man deme sol recht thun, soll man ihm seinen nabel bei seinem bauch aufschneiden u. ein darm daraus thun, denselbigen nageln an den stamm u. mit der person herumgehen, so ,lang er ein darm in seinem leib hat' ['and whoever is caught stripping off a standing tree, mercy would have been more benificial to him than the law is; for when law is to be fulfilled, then one is to cut up his stomach at the navel, and pull out a length of the gut. The gut is to be nailed to the tree, and one is to keep going around that tree with the person, so long as he still has any part of the gut left in his body']
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> Jacob Grimm observes, that no actual case where this punishment was carried out has been found in records from that time period (15th century). However, some 300–500 years earlier, the Western Slavic tribes like the Wends are said to have revenged themselves upon Christians in this way, by binding the guts to an erect pole, and driving them around until the person was fully eviscerated.[2] In the 13th century, members of the now extinct Baltic ethnic group of Old Prussians in one of the battles against the Teutonic Knights, are said to have captured one such knight in 1248, and made to undergo this punishment.[3]"[1]

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[1] Wikipedia's reference: "For a number of such ordinances, see Grimm, Jacob (1854). Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer. Göttingen: Dieterich. pp. 519–20. Retrieved 2013-03-13."

[2] Wikipedia's reference: "i) General comment, with connotations of this being a type of human sacrifice Hübner, Johann (1703). Kurtze Fragen aus der politischen Historia, volume 6. Gleditsch. p. 500. Retrieved 2013-03-13., ii) 8th century description from 772–73, Caesar, Aquilin Julius (1786). Beschreibung des Herzogthum Steyermarks, Volume 1. Gräz: Zaunrith. pp. 88–89. Retrieved 2013-03-13., iii) Danish 1096 retaliation on Wends, by like execution method, Sell, Johann Jakob (1819). Geschichte des Herzogthums Pommern, volume 1. Berlin: Flittner. pp. 88–89. Retrieved 2013-03-13., iv) 1131 pagan attacks on Christians by Wends, Röper, Friedrich L. (1808). Geschichte und Anekdoten von Dobberan in Mecklenburg. Dobberan: Self-published. pp. 111–13. Retrieved 2013-03-13."

[3] Wikipedia's reference: "Voigt, Johannes (1827). Geschichte Preussens: Von den altesten Zeiten bis zum Untergange der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens. Die Zeit von der Ankunft

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As a dangerous shadow of the past or a as a reactivated psycho-splanchnic nerve, the ritual as such seems to have appealed to the rebellious voices of the French revolution – hence Diderot's gory minded meditation. Of course, nobody can deny that Diderot's wish to see "*the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest*" withholds a special flavour of mystery and even of psychological riddle – and that is why it acquired such a rich spectrum of interpretations.

Still, Diderot's use of intestines to induce a sense of mystery and a challenging enigma is nothing but another use of an ancient Pagan symbolism in what concerns some of the viscera. Mircea Eliade shows that *the earliest* (we could say, the instinctual) *symbolism* relating to the intestines was one which associated these parts of the human body with the labyrinth:

> "But the historian of religions encounters other homologies that presuppose a more developed symbolism, a whole system of micro-macrocosmic correspondences. Such, for example, is the assimilation of the belly or the womb to a cave, of the intestines to a labyrinth, of breathing to weaving, of the veins and arteries to the sun and moon, of the backbone to the *axis mundi*, and so on. "[2]

4. Voltaire's wicked rationalization of the objects of pagan worship corrected through Edmund Husserl's theories on the "merely intentional" objects (or why not all barbarians are also pagans)

Voltaire's (or, by his real name, François-Marie Arouet) three-year exile in England (an alternative to being imprisoned in Bastille without any limit of time – as a consequence of an arbitrary penal decree signed by French King Louis XV) and his contact with the modern conservatism in there, made him a hybrid thinker, we could even say, a rebel without a precise cause.

Unlike Montesquieu and Diderot, in the eyes of the English conservatists he represents a radically different type of barbarism – the excessive incisiveness and the irreverent cold-grinding and attrition of a fierce rationality. As a keen historian, he had a vast-enough perspective on human customs and mentalities so as to be able to release a heartless criticism on mysticism, faith, idolatry and on any form of accepted mysterious reverence.

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des Ordens bis zum Frieden 1249, Volume 2. Königsberg: Bornträger. pp. 613–614. Retrieved 2013-03-13."

[1] Wikipedia's page for "Disembowelment": http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disembowelment (accessed September 7th 2013).

[2] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, The Nature of Religion,* Translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), 169.

Irina Dumitraşcu Măgurean, *Silence*
10,8 cm x 8,5 cm, polaroid, 2014

In the logic of our study here, we could say that, when projected into the English intellectual environment, Voltaire represented not the threat of a resurrected paganism, but the very opposite phenomenon – the extreme intensification of reason and of calculations that threatens to erase the sacred territories of imagination and to replace them with patterns and matrixes of automatons. Because of this aspect he even typifies *the triggering element* of a desperately-recuperatory pagan (archaic, mystic) instinct in the British Gothic art. English Gothicism resurrected pagan frantic, undomesticated and spellful contexts, images, intuitions and creatures

especially when it saw the private and collective ancestral sacred memories of modern individuals (their immemorial hopes and fantasies and their fragile and unconfessed expectancies) invaded and attacked by hungry, heedless and, we could say, spoiled rationalists.[1] Voltaire was one of them and he began showing a *discourteous disdain* (if we are to attempt a poetic emphasis here) and abhorrence ***explicitly*** ("with a special dedication" – in modern ironic terms) ***for the pagan historical roots*** of mysticism and fancy, that is, for the pagans' ways of worshiping ardently their gods and of gaining unsuspected strengths from such fusions.

This kind of an abstract intellectual rejection was stemming, in his case, as it was normal, from an overwhelming accent placed on *the glamorization of reason* and of *heavy criticism* (ignoring the limit beyond which they become *a form of denigration*).

Voltaire speaks of faith (in the article using the word as its very title ["Faith"] from his *Philosophical Dictionary*) in terms of a *depletion* of the capacity to reason and to see the broader ontological perspective; in terms of intellectual laziness or of aristocratic spiritual convenience (conservatism at best); and maybe even in terms of some *inherent limits* that unimaginative and unambitious people carry within and whose existence they instinctively deny. According to Voltaire, such denials are possible only by labelling such limits not for what *they* really are but for what their believers hope *them* to be: *mystery* as the very proof of the living possibility of the impossible; *magic* as the confirmation that it is not we that bear the responsibility and the necessary vision for our lives but another entity; *omnipresence and ubiquity* as calming (soothing) marks of the conceivability of an overprotective quality of energy unfolding itself all over us:

> "What is faith? Is it to believe that which is evident? No. It is perfectly evident to my mind that there exists a necessary, eternal, supreme, and intelligent being. This is no matter of faith, but of reason (...). Divine faith, about which so much has been written, is evidently nothing more than incredulity brought under subjection, for we certainly have no other faculty than the understanding by which we can believe; and the objects of faith are not those of the understanding. We can believe only what appears to be true; and nothing can appear true but in one of the three following ways: by intuition or feeling, as I exist, I see the sun; by an accumulation of probability amounting to certainty, as there is a city called Constantinople; or by positive demonstration, as triangles of the same base and height are equal. Faith, therefore (...) can be nothing but the annihilation of reason, a silence of adoration at the contemplation of things absolutely incomprehensible. Thus, speaking philosophically, no person believes the Trinity; no person believes that the same body can be in a thousand places at once; and he who says, I believe these mysteries, will see, beyond the possibility of a doubt, if he reflects for a moment on what passes in his

[1] English Gothic during the eighteenth century meant "a revival of imagination in an era that privileged rationality" – James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic. Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

> mind, that these words mean no more than, I respect these mysteries; I submit myself to those who announce them."[1]

It is not hard to anticipate that the "natural" development of such a way of thinking is to label the true believer as the truest ignorant and to regard such ignorance as the fertile soil on which the tyranny of kings blossoms into crude and carnivorous flowers. In Voltaire's vision, enslavement is achieved and effected through the cultivation of *ignorance*; an ignorance which he sees as having its roots in the old pagan world where people would practice rituals of *worshipping* (*idolatrizing*) wooden, stone or metal idols (sculptured or painted representations):

> "As for polytheism, good sense will inform you that once there were men, which is to say weak animals, capable of reason, subject to all sorts of accidents, to illness and to death, these men felt their weakness and their dependence; they readily recognized that there is something more powerful than them. They felt a force in the earth that produces their food; one in the air that often destroys it; one in the fire that consumes and in the water that submerges. What more natural in ignorant men than to imagine beings who preside over these elements! What more natural than to revere the invisible force that made the sun and the stars to shine in their eyes? And as soon as one wished to form an idea of these powers superior to man, what more natural again than to configure them in some sensible manner?"[2]

This passage is part of a famous article entitled "Idol, Idolator, Idolatry", conceived *for* and published *in* Diderot's *Encyclopedia.* As if anticipating Edmund Husserl's notion of "natural attitude", Voltaire is among the first and rare thinkers of past centuries to interpret ignorance as falling into a natural state (the unproblematic condition of beasts [of burden]). The entire article constitutes an unprecedented diatribe against, we could say in modern terms, "the (desperate) absolutization of otherness" through objects of cult. If the pagans regarded their gods as "absolute others", as ultimate carriers of promises, Voltaire attempts to defuse such tense (and dense) adhesions by introducing a principle of intellectual relativity as opposed to the brute (natural) abandonment at the mercy of chance and of fascination:

> "But what precise notion did the ancient nations have about all these simulacra? What virtue, what power was attributed to them? Was it believed that the gods descended from heaven in order to come hide themselves in these statues? Or that they (the gods) communicated to them (the statues) some portion of the divine spirit? Or that they did not transfer to them

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[1] Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/v/voltaire/dictionary/chapter 196.html, (accessed April 23rd, 2013)

[2] Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet de. "Idol, Idolator, Idolatry." *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Erik Liddell. Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2006. Taken from http://hdl.handle.net/ 2027/spo.did2222.0000.523 (accessedApril 23rd , 2013)

> anything at all? On this, people have so far written very little of use; it is clear that each man judges of them according to his degree of reason, or credulity, or fanaticism. It is evident that the priests attach the greatest divinity to their statues, in order to attract more offerings; it is known that the Philosophers detested these superstitions; that the warriors mocked them; that the magistrates tolerated them, and that the people, absurd as ever, did not know what it was doing: such, in a few words, is the history of all the nations to whom God did not make himself known."[1]

With Voltaire, the French philosophy enters a first major process of relativization, one which makes its "pioneering" attempts to replace eternal truths with temporary truths, and the fascination with the unexpected paths with the contentment with the logical units of measurement of possibilities.

Voltaire accused the pagans of being mindless worshipers of objects (personifying various idols or gods) and, in order to sustain his idea, he provides his readers with two famous contrastive examples from history - *a positive one* from the Roman world (where, according to him, the gods were regarded as being present first of all in the actions of men), and *a negative one* from the very building of Hagia Sophia (a case discussed previously in this study and a site which remains truly fascinating because it witnessed and withstood an almost entire spectrum of transformations of the religious thought and behaviour):

> "When the Roman and Carthaginian captains sealed a treaty, they called all the gods to witness. 'It is in their presence,' they said, 'that we shall swear peace.' Now the statues of these gods, of which the number was very long, were not in the general's tent. They regarded the gods as present in the actions of men, as witnesses, as judges, and it was assuredly not the simulacrum which constituted divinity. (...) it is an abuse of terms to call idolaters the peoples who rendered worship to the sun and stars. These nations did not long have simulacra or temples; if they were deceived, it was in rendering to the stars what they owed to the creator of the stars."[2]

> "Since men very rarely have precise ideas, and still less do they express them in precise words and without equivocation, we have called the Gentiles, and above all the Polytheists, by the name idolaters. (...) Genghis Khan among the Tartars was not an idolater, and had no simulacra; the Muslims who fill Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Persia, India and Africa call the Christians idolaters, giaour, because they believe that the Christians render worship to images. They broke all the statues that found in Constantinople in Hagia Sophia, in the church of the holy Apostles and in the others which they converted into mosques."[3]

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[1] Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet de. "Idol, Idolator, Idolatry" http://hdl.handle.net/ 2027/ spo.did2222.0000.523 (accessed April 24th , 2013)
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

It is pretty hard to understand the essence of Voltaire's war against carved, melted or sculptured idols, in the context where his religious position remains unclear and so does his message in this regard. Not being able to assign his ideas to a recognizable spiritual form of whatever kind, nor to a sacred or at least artistic vision, we can only regard them as part of an attempt to replace religion with logic or to turn logic and scepticism into a religion for the otherwise irreligious ones (or, better said, into the only possible form of fidelity and devotion for the infidels and for the undevout [profane] ones by nature). By calling idolatry deeply offensive, Voltaire wrongly generalizes and, with a *rational* (this time) *fanaticism* he unsustainably considers that idolatry can bring no helpful insight, that it can arouse no true passion and no true connection, that it creates only utopian and improbable visions disrupted from the real life, together with an *exacerbated symbolism*:

> "It appears that there has never been any people on the earth who took for themselves the name of idolater. This word is an insult that the Gentiles, the Polytheists seemed to deserve; but it is certain that if one had asked at the senate of Rome, at the areopagus of Athens, at the court of the kings of Persia, 'Are you idolaters?' they would hardly have understood the question. No one would have replied, 'We worship images, idols.' One finds the words, idolater, idolatry, neither in Homer, nor in Hesiod, nor in Herodotus, nor in any religious author of the Gentiles. There has never been any edict, any law which commanded that people should worship idols, that they should serve them as gods, that they should believe them gods."[1]

For sure, reason and passion are not mutually exclusive, nor are science and religion (as the American pragmatists had clearly showed it in the 19th century). Both reason and religious passion should be used and understood so as not to block initiatives, not to obstruct the revelation of a sense of the Self, or to generate distrust for anything outside the sphere of the object of worship, or, in the other cases, outside the sphere of the (explicit) possibility of making sense of a phenomenon. In other words, the "impossibility" of something should be regarded as a viable phenomenological condition in the construction of meaning. Because if *it* is used inadequately, it creates bad self-presentations. Nevertheless, objects, when approached with the right spirit and with a warm and cosy-enough obsession, can reveal themselves as important magnetic junctures and as synthetic crystals of the Self, in both its physical and metaphysical coordinates (trails of progressive and *regressive* [*with the sense of recuperatory*] unfoldings).

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We consider Voltaire an incomplete and still confuse exercise into both *the spirit of reason* and *the reason of the spirit* and we use Husserl's theories about *intentional*

[1] Ibid.

and *true* objects in order to try to correct Voltaire's prejudiced perception of special (sacred) objects through an ill-natured use of reason.

Husserl's discussion in this respect revolves around the dichotomy of the "objectless ideas" ("mere fictions" – here the intention lacks an external object) and the "ideal objects" (concrete [not fictitious] numbers, qualities and principles).

A "*merely intentional object*" is for Husserl an objectless idea and the analogue of an intention that lacks its intended object. According to Husserl, the reality of an object is not something exhaustible by the brute (physical) existence (presence) of that object. On the contrary – we could claim by using a modern terminology – the "genetic code", the "design" or the "matrix" of an object, the sacredness of its possibility (the mother-emotion and state-of-mind that stands behind all human endeavours across histories) is to be found first and foremost in our intentions. The presence of an object in our intentions gives the real quality to the human project, and not the physical or brute presence of an object into our environment – because when still in our intentions, that object "embodies" an infinite potential and a total presence of energy*:*

> "If I represent God to myself, or an angel, or an intelligible thing-in-itself, or a physical thing or a round square etc., I mean the transcendent object named in each case, in other words my intentional object: it makes no difference whether this object exists or is imaginary or absurd. *'The object is merely intentional' does not, of course, mean that it exists, but only in an intention, of which it is a real (reelles) part, or that some shadow of it exists*. (our italics) It means rather that the intention, the reference to an object so qualified exists, but not that the object does. If the intentional object exists, the intention, the reference does not exist alone, but the thing referred to exists also." [1]

Moreover, we could try to radicalize Husserl's idea and claim that the purity of our intentions (and the fascinating transformative force of the energies therein) is given by the lack of the object in our effective reality – in which case the physical absence of an object becomes a constitutive absence, because that absence triggers a fabulous spectrum of possibilities or, to put it otherwise, it releases the object back into its pure godly (divine) possibility (Husserl's "merely intentional object" reassumed by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden as a "purely intentional object"). Following this logic, we could say that the physical presence of the object impurifies the intention and that it chases away the divine and the mesmerizing spirit of an object.

Since we do not live in a perfect reality, no intention can be said to relate perfectly to its object, even when that object has a definite physical reality. In other words the effective and the affective qualities of the objects surrounding us remain peculiar to the intention as such – as a transformative divine essence of man – rather than derived from the relation existing between an object and its intention

[1] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume II*. Translated by J.N. Findlay (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 127.

(intentional relation). And this remains a rather mysterious phenomenal quality of the object – a reality often managed for us by our imagination but still independent of this human faculty and having its roots in the divine spheres of the purity of the energies and essences. This is, we think, the real meaning of Husserl's strange words from the passage cited above and according to which *"some shadow of the object"* persists in our intentions, that is, there is some shadowy quality of the object than can never be fully transposed into reality and that invests that object with its sacred / magic aura of mystery-as-possibility.

This is the "mechanism" of the divine quality present in the objects of worship. Such objects of worship function as special mirrors or as remainders of the providential shadowy presences in our intentionality that keep each and every object (and the ideas which those objects stand for) as open-possibilities. The openness of such possibilities are signalled (made intelligible) through mystery and fascination. Some of the old pagans managed to intuitively relate to this reality-creating and reality-sustaining phenomenon, and constructed around it *the meaning of their lives as religious feeling*, while Voltaire failed to grasp this mysterious power of the sacred objects and preferred to barbarously mock them. He *becomes in the act an atypical and modern barbarian or an unique savage – a wicked rationalist*. *Just a barbarian, but not a pagan*.

5. Rousseau's comparative look between the ancient natural fusion between religion and politics and the modern artificial reconstruction and re-enactment of this societal impulse

Jean Jacques Rousseau represents a crucial point in the Western political philosophy as he was the first to see and to criticize the way in which the modern societies retrace and reconstruct the previous pagan natural fusion between the spiritual dominants and the immediate strategic purposes. He also signalled *the critical and harmful level differences* that appear in such staged and forced social frauds (historical anomalies): if in the ancient societies the worshiping of the gods was inevitably the same thing with the loyalty to the state (to the tribe, better said) and the conquered populations adopted by virtue of a truly natural necessity (the pure need for survival and the no less purer recognition of the force of their victorious opponents) the gods and the habits of their conquerors, modern societies, according to Rousseau, turned religion into a supreme law of intolerance and into an abstract and thus unnatural reason for destroying other civilizations and territories. They even divided the world into two purely intellectual categories – *the infidels and the elects* – two so-called "total" states of positive and negative purity, things that have nothing to do with any real situation or human specificity. From this point of view Rousseau adopts the pagan model as the original archetypal structure that sustains from behind and from within any society and he attempts to show the evils that appear when such a structure is transplanted from a natural configuration into an abstract and falsifying one: because a *universal* religion – Christianity –, with a credo designed so as to maintain and construct the webs of political influence in a society, when compared to the previous strong local and regional pagan *specificities*, reduces the religious feeling to a bleak and barren vision that chases away all the

warmth and cosiness that constituted the heart of the previous pagan sweet *superstitions*, *shiverings* and auroral *devotions* – all of *them* derived from the unique details of the landscape, and from the nature of the human and natural resources. Here we will assume Rousseau's lines of reasoning inside Timothy O'Hagan's grid of interpretation:

> "'Primitive' religion, for Rousseau, was a polytheism practiced by small societies relatively isolated from one another: 'From the very fact that God was set over every political society, it followed that there were as many gods as peoples…National divisions…led to polytheism, and this in turn gave rise to theological and civil intolerance' (SC IV.8.460/216). Rousseau's history is not an innocent one. He uses the historical narrative in order to contrast the relationship between religion and the state as it is in modern times and as it was in the past. Thus 'primitive' intolerance is different from modern intolerance, so that 'in paganism, where each society had its worship and its tutelary deities, there were no wars of Religion' (ibid.). Indeed, in the *Geneva Manuscript*, Rousseau even talks of the 'mutual tolerance' at the heart of 'pagan superstition' (GM 338/119). Rousseau removes that latter comment from the published version and with it an apparent contradiction. But if we bear in mind the contrast between the ancient and the modern, we can understand Rousseau's train of thought like this. Ancient peoples were aggressive towards neighbouring peoples. Since religious identity and political identity were more or less fused, 'political war was also theological war' (SC IV.8.460/216) and 'since the obligation to change one's religion was the law of the vanquished, one had first to be victorious before one talked about [conversion]' (SC IV.8.461/217). In that sense the pagans of old were intolerant. But at the same time they observed a 'mutual tolerance' (GM 338/119), since, unlike modern crusaders, they did not go to war in order to convert the infidel. Such an idea makes no sense until the arrival of monotheist religions with ambitions of universal conversion. Instead, among polytheistic pagans, the defeated recognized the conquerors' gods as part of the panoply of their power. The unification imposed by the Roman Empire put an end to the diversity of polytheism within its borders, and 'paganism throughout the known world finally came to one and the same religion'. The moment of Christianity was at hand: 'It was in these circumstances that Jesus came to establish a Spiritual kingdom, which, by separating the theological from the political system, made the state no longer one, and caused the internal divisions which have never ceased to trouble Christian people.' (SC IV.8.462/217) (…)'this double power and conflict of jurisdiction [which] have made all good polity impossible in Christian States; and men have never succeeded in finding out whether they were bound to obey the master or the priest'(Sc IV.8.462/218)."[1]

[1] Timothy O'Hagan, *Rousseau*, (The Arguments of the Philosophers, edited by Ted Honderich) (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 153–154.

Basically, at Rousseau the conflict between paganism and Christianity appears as a sheer conflict between the natural and the unnatural; or between the one which lives and breeds out of its inner clear harmonies (a self-sustained collective psyche that projects itself completely in the environment and in his acts; or, we could say while using a modern terminology, an exuberant psyche untouched by various types of castration) and the one which grows against itself, against its construction and the elevating power of its instincts.

In matters of religion, the causes of revolt in his writings coincide with the very causes of this unnaturalness and aberrant insufficiency brought about by the sustained institutionalization of Christianity. Thus, when he attacks religion, he attacks not the pagan primordial sense of this imperative necessity seeded deep in the fibres of man, but the modern institutional sense – and he implicitly advocates the need to return in spirit[1] and not in letter to the pagan model of feeling and of intuition:

> "The *Geneva Manuscript* begins with an overview of the theme of the chapter, which bridges the speculative history and the normative programme. 'As soon as men live in society', says Rousseau, 'they need a Religion to keep them there. No people has ever survived or will survive without religion…' The 'need' for religion is not spiritual, but practical. Without religion, a people would soon be destroyed: 'In any state which can require its members to sacrifice their lives, any person who does not believe in the after-life is either a coward or a madman…' (GM 336/117)"[2]

As it can be noticed, Rousseau discusses the relationship between state, Christianity and previous pagan customs solely in the context of what is known as the dichotomy between the "civil religion" and the inner sacred religiousness. He observes that, when because of the historical situation created by the Roman Empire the peoples of Europe abandoned their previous pagan gods and "embraced" Christianity, a serious derangement of the social apparatus took place and it generated atypical and often *incompatible* forms of legitimation, motivation and justification: if in the ancient pagan societies the spiritual identity and the political one were organically intertwined and they constantly mirrored back each-other's essence and purposes, in the Christian context the Church became an universal power *in itself*, *by itself* and *for itself*, and it basically liberated its representations and its ideas from specific geographical or racial areas, managing to cast over the world a self-relevant *levelling philosophical canopy*. Meanwhile, politics remained stuck in local purposes and discourses and resented very bitterly this identity-split. This tension (now a fierce competition between religion and politics for finding, opening and maintaining social spheres of loyalty) projected itself heavily upon the citizens and caused therein deep traumas, especially at the level of traditional local communities who were not at all used to such a division in the ethos of their society – as they were still

[1] We are talking here about one of the two main types of religion which he advances, namely "the religion of man", a subject on which we will insist later on.
[2] O'Hagan, *Rousseau*, 153.

acutely impregnated with the old pagan integrated vision. Having to solve this problem of legitimation and, after all, *of profit* and *of influence sharing* disturbing modern societies, the authorities eventually found a solution and invented the so called "religion of the citizen", a religion which combines aspects of faith with political interests and which sits at the basis of the historically fatal artificial fusion between the Christian Church and the political institutions of the state – a fusion which later (in the 19th and 20th centuries) became both the symbol of social cohesion, identification and acknowledgement and the obsession of the philosophical critical attacks, the most prominent voices being those of Friedrich Nietzsche and of Michail Bakunin.

This assimilative use of religion for social and political purposes found its prototype, as Frank Pagano observes when analyzing the previous case of Montesquieu, in the Roman Empire's need to extend its influence over vast geographical areas containing an otherwise irreconcilable diversity of races and spiritual visions and needs:

> "Montesquieu testifies in an early work, *Dissertation sur la Politique des Romains dans la Religion* (1716), that '…the Romans following the example of the Greeks adroitly confounded foreign divinities with their own; if they found in their conquests a god that had a relation to some one that they worshipped at Rome, they adopted it, as it were, while giving to it the name of the Roman divinity…' (...) [a.n. Greeks] were not as tolerant as the Romans. Every Greek knew the fate of Socrates. Since Rome was more tolerant than the Greeks, it was easier for it to adapt foreign gods to its use. *Rome used them to construct its empire* (*our italics*). " (1949:158)[1]

Mutually exclusive, the two types of religion symbolize in Rousseau's logic the very split between the pagan and pre-pagan savage worlds of the Self and the socially pre-fabricated influence and constellations of interests of modern Christianity.

From now on, the core of the problem is no longer the savage purity and beauty of the religious feeling and of its authenticity as a possible mirror of a personal or of a collective identity, but the inadmissible and the horrid (extremely disagreeable and offensive) intrusion of politics into the sacred places and palaces of the Self – places and palaces which, Rousseau seems to suggest (though he officially speaks in an almost "politically correct" manner of a balanced argumentation), deserve being defended with an equally savage and justified instinct of self-preservation:

> "'Considered in relation to society, which is either general or particular, religion can be divided into two kinds, namely the religion of man and that

[1] Frank N. Pagano (St. John's College Santa Fe, NM), "Greek Pettiness in Montesquieu's Considerations of the Grandeur of the Romans". P.6. Material prepared for delivery at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1–September 4, 2005 Copyright by the American Political Science Association. Available on-line at http://citation.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/3/9/7/6/pages39762/p39762-1.php, (accessed September 4th 2013)

of the citizen. The former, without Temples, altars or rites, limited to the purely internal worship of the Supreme God and to the eternal duties of morality, is the pure and simple Religion of the Gospel, or true Theism. The latter, inscribed within a single country, gives it its Gods, its tutelary Patrons. It has its dogmas, its rites and its external form of worship prescribed by the laws; outside the single Nation that follows it, everything is considered infidel, foreign, barbarous; it extends the duties and rights of man as far as its altars' (SC IV.8. 464/219)

The religion of the citizens is here indistinguishable from the polytheistic cults described in the historical sketch. The religion of man, in contrast, is an ideal type, supposedly extracted from the Gospel, a combination of monotheism and moral duty. (…) Rousseau then outlines the positive and negative features of the two main types. From this it emerges that each is the precise inverse of the other. The religion of the citizen:

'is good in that it unites divine worship with love of the laws, and in making the homeland the object of citizens' adoration, it teaches them that to serve the State is to serve its tutelary God… But it is bad in that, being founded on error and lies, it deceives men, makes them credulous and superstitious, and drowns true worship of the divinity in vain ceremonial. It is bad too when it becomes exclusive and tyrannical and makes a people bloody and intolerant…' (SC IV.8.464-5/219-20)

(…) the religion of man (…) Its disadvantage is that it: 'having no particular relation to the body politic, leaves the laws with only their intrinsic force without making any addition to it; and so one of the great bonds which can unite a particular society remains without effect. Even worse, far from attaching the hearts of the Citizens to the State, it detaches them from all earthly things: I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit.' (SC IV.8.465/220)"[1]

6. Conclusions: politics and poetry – the poetry of war?

The interesting initial twist that Rousseau gave to the conflicting alliance between the Church and the State is to be found in the fact that he explicitly-enough assigned the personal (inner sacred) religious motivation ("the religion of man") to a persisting pagan feeling and to its intense but often concealed (subconscious) nostalgia, while melancholically opposing it to the modern social processes of levelling and of assimilation through a combined religious and political strategy ("*the religion of the citizens*") – an alliance of pettiness and a fractured reproduction (abstract, inconsistent with itself and insignificant at the deep personal levels of motivation and of devotion) of previous archaic models of organically and emotionally mixed spiritual and strategic visions.

Despite the fact that his analysis of the two types of religious expression and implementation remains that of a pragmatic politician and not of a warrior-poet, a bittersweet longing for past harmonies and (sacred) inner peaces breathes heavily

[1] O'Hagan, *Rousseau*, 154–155.

from behind all his analytic lines, and so does a deep sense of revolt against the politicized, abusive and fake modern world.

The latter is a feeling that is a full part of Janus' double face – the Roman god of new beginnings and impossible transitions – and, as such, it ultimately redefines itself in the form of a need to return to basics of naturalism.

Later exegetical echoes, such as the one represented by Frank N. Pagano's analysis on Montesquieu, redefined Rousseau's dichotomy of the religion of the citizen and the religion of man as a dichotomy of the political religion and poetical religion. Pagano speaks about religions conceived so as to serve the state, and about states conceived so as to serve religious purposes. The Roman paganism was such a religion constructed around the objectives of the state (a political religion) and it rightly appeared to the modern progressive thinkers of the 18th century as a ridiculous (because painfully obvious) artefact (Rousseau's "religion of the citizen").

The mistake, however, of Voltaire and of other similar voices was to generalize this pattern and to apply it to all forms of religious feeling – or, to put it otherwise, to filter all religious experience through the Roman (politically-biased) model within which religious devotion was either a case of fancy extravagance or one of military mystic devotion (we could say, the historical cornerstone of the future "cult of heroes" so venomously implemented by the Nazi regime in 20th century Europe).

> "The Roman legislators, according to Montesquieu, differed from those of other peoples, including the Greeks, in that the Romans made their religion for the state while the others made the state for religion (81). Roman paganism was the most ridiculous of all religions, and its unreasonableness allowed it to be the perfect political religion. (...)As it was, educated people found it too fantastic to believe. Yet the general populace believed that the more fantastic it was, the more credible it was as religious truth. Montesquieu ends his *Dissertation* with this claim: 'The credulity of peoples, which is always beyond the ridiculous and extravagant, repairs everything' (92). Because the populace believed that the entrails of birds predicted the future, the sophisticated could follow the maxim that good omens must always indicate the good of the republic, and early political leaders would repeat sacrifices until the omens indicated the course that the leaders judged good for the republic. Montesquieu maintains that the Roman religion had two politically beneficial consequences: the people kept their oaths, which was the nerve of their military discipline, and the nobles dedicated themselves to the good of the republic.
>
> While stories of forswearers descending to a hell of pain would instil among a credulous people an abhorrence of oath-breaking, there does not seem to be a religious reason that kept the nobles dedicated to the good of the republic (1951:121, note a). Roman religious credulity therefore had a deeper foundation than mere extravagance. The Greek religion lacked this foundation perhaps because their paganism was poetic and therefore less popular. (...) Montesquieu notes that the Romans actually felt this strength in themselves and therefore for them it was believable in ancient heroes. For some reason, the Greeks did not feel this same strength. The Romans were credulous because from the founding of Rome they were adherents to a brand of materialism. They grounded their beliefs in a trust of their bodies. They believed their senses: what they saw,

> heard and felt. The Romans easily believed in the gods and heroes because the Roman way of life and its emphasis on exercise made Rome's citizen-soldiers feel strong. The heroes were merely stronger extensions of Roman soldiers. Consonant with their belief in the feeling of their own strength was the punishment of soldiers with blood-letting. They were made to feel weak in their bodies and in consequence they felt diminished in spirit. Romans of all classes, whether commoners or nobles, believed in the truth of spectacles."[1]

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Such visions and theories later agglutinated into a solid and nucleic concept within the political philosophy, the concept of the "state of nature" – one which finds in Montesquieu, in Diderot and mostly in Rousseau its founding fathers; and one which was a profound influence for all subsequent nostalgic, repressed or feared pagan apparitions in arts (Gothic literature especially).

The dichotomy between the patriarchal autarkic households (founded on personal liberties and initiatives) and the overwhelming influence of the state authority over the lives of citizens (constant control and external demand legitimized with arguments that refer to the wellbeing of the community and to the continuity through stability of the state or of the city-structures) is (as it has always been) surpassable at the level of the religious feeling.

As an emotional supra-solicitation of man's potential and as an overwhelming trans-contextual stream of motivation – religion has always had access to man sacred crystals or, otherwise said, it has always been able to reveal man's full spectrum of identitary planar faces and, most of all, to release the unknown and unapproachable essences that unite such faces into consistent, clear, transparent and impenetrable structures of the Self (crystals), structures encapsulating both the urges and the transforming visions into harmonious formulas.

7. Extroduction: The Stallion of Reason

The unusual length of the quotes justifies itself by the fact that they offer indispensable information to the approached theme, in a form which is almost completely sketched/mapped/worked out at a conceptual and even at a stylistic-existential level; a collection of rhetorical over-bids (and overcalls) that serves, in an essential manner, the correct placement (from a methodological and from a "logically-emotional" viewpoint) within the epistemological frames and within those of the history of ideas. Nevertheless it should be mentioned that although some of them come from the so-called "secondary sources", those which are specially chosen have a sufficiently powerful synthetic and, mostly, syncretic character, decisive and of a matrix nature (from the perspective of the cohesiveness and coherence of the base structure of the "towing" force of the conceptual chains) anchored (in the "quote within quote system") in the concreteness of the prime source – namely in the most successful and intensely circulated, at an academic level, translation into English from the classic texts of the period (Rousseau's case).

[1] Pagano, "Greek Pettiness in Montesquieu's Considerations of the Grandeur of the Romans", 7.

At the same time it is very important the remark according to which, the present essay, although it broadcasts and conveys classical themes of the 18th century philosophy, it does so more in virtue of some aesthetic and neo-phenomenologically-poetic purposes than in virtues of some conceptually-analytic or cognitively-"anaclitic" ones. It uses conceptual organizations and conceptual juxtapositions and connections only as frames of reference, as foundations and as mechanical flanges for the integrated pressure-transmission of some more *esoteric designs*; of some quasi-transcendental corpuses made of streamy manifestations of the primal focuses of consciousnesses that, by the pure grace of their inevitably primitive axial nature, outlive and outshine the cultural frames and that, as such, do not really survive in their natural form except in the darkest and most peripheral and unsuspected (as well as uncontrollable) corners of the *discourses* and, especially in-between *their* main lines (inside our essay, this is the case of our ultra-daring interpretation of Diderot's vision of *a last king strangled with the entrails of a last priest*).

These strayed ardours of the dangerously-unexplored inner powers haunt, hunt and corner the reason from everywhere, as shadows from Hell, but, interestingly, they constitute simultaneously the terrifying beauty of the rhythm of poetry (but, beware!, not of the poetries of the rhythm) actually living in and from the involuntary visceral violences, exacerbations and enthusiasms of formulations (of expressions).

In this way, the fact that in some cases we insist more on one philosopher while in other cases we use a significantly diminished accentuation, is not due to a superficiality of the approach and of the research behind it, but to the fact that – from Diderot, for example – we were interested to take into account only some very isolated aspects from the thinker's work and to introduce them on the orbit of a new course of thought (a way of thinking that almost seeds a thirst for a philosophical revisionism), and, ultimately, of feeling: one strongly personalized and vibrant at the very level of (or consonant with) the dangerous and downright toxic veins of the text. Far from insignificant is in here the special ideational delta which is created in the whirlings and in the maelstroms of the deconstructions made not in/with the letter but in/with the spirit of postmodernism: it is the case of an otherwise very interesting and important place from the perspective of the cultural influence, and our essay tries to use its themes in order to highlight once more the existence of a special place of assimilation within the contemporary cultural ethos: the trans-textuality where the esoteric melts into the exoteric: let's think for example how would a listener of the Death-metal musical current (more precisely of the band Cannibal Corpse) read Diderot's phrase about entrails used for strangling, and what would it say about the French thinker a possible/eventual Proustian jouissance of this latter one (at the hearing of the words of the maestro of the *Encyclopedia* about commanding figures being strangled with entrails), a jouissance of that precise type described by Proust: *"Every reader finds himself. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument that makes it possible for the reader to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have seen in himself."*(Marcel Proust)[1]

[1] https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/246311-every-reader-finds-himself-the-writer-s-work-is-merely-a, (accessed March 25th , 2014)

Our essay attempts, thus, to open a line of thought which does not particularly want to "do justice" to the historical character which is Diderot, but rather to read between the lines and even in the subconscious of the author and of his historical epoch (one in which the enthusiasm of the change skidded voraciously and uninhibited in any way, un-castrated, un-fragmented and culturally un-syncopated).

We preferred this diachronically unusual approach, deconstructivist in an a-historical and poetically-visceral sense, in order to be able to realize or at least to localize that which has not been read until now in the work of the previously mentioned thinkers – although, this "something" clearly existed there as some impassible and implacably-defiant exclamation marks at the address of culture's heavy and deafening blankets: the slime of culture that Heidegger spoke about, seeing it as clouding, as darkening (blackening with a cold-acre disheartening and very bad-omened darkness) and as drowning with mud and silt the capture-pipes and the glades of the Being.

We preferred the present approach being motivated precisely by the weight with which "the mantras" (the heavy instruments of thought) of the canonical cultures press on the revealing feelings, but also on the resentments (re-sentiments) of the possibilizing inconsistencies[1] (where the "re-" is the "re-" of the Husserlian phenomenological reduction, of the reinvention and of re-actualization of the self *in* and *from* its very deadly/fatal crevices [inconsistencies]).

Therefore, our essay is a direct expression, precisely because it is honestly and sincerely bricolated (from where the impression of an article being turned into a "hazy" [freestyled] enumeration of different ideas), of the mystico-cynical and enterprisingly/craftily-Machiavellian faith according to which the author gets to be better read in his small slips than in his big themes – the much ovated "big themes" being, after all, "but" those (tired and expired avant- and devant-la-lettre) closely-studied exercises in concatenations (restoring adhesion, we may say, to the old and strongly worn down/deteriorated icons, with the purpose of the rehabilitation of the monumentality through which these prefabrications dominate and possess the social landscapes) on those political lines of a ferociously-disreprovable sterility of "elegance" (correct only within an emotionally-, poetically- and phenomenologically-impracticable pathology of the abstract[2]).

In today's accepted academic body of specialized words relating to a particular subjects, the present article as such could be regarded as a faithful echo of

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[1] In other words, (press) on any interpretation of any salutarily-augurous, dissident and apostatic remainder from the work of the author.

[2] Which abstract becomes, in this case, a third degree Platonic copy, a prefabricated weakness of the *Idea of force – which* is otherwise incarnated by the same abstract by breathing *it* as an act inspiring [inhaling] itself [we use "inspiring" both in the sense of absorbing/capturing air, and in the sense of allowing itself to be inspired], in the realms of the transcendental, that is, in the supra celestial world in which the Name written with capital N designates, practically, the prototypes, the matrixes, the archetypes and other *premieres* still vague and deformed / or decanted for the very first time from the subterfuges of the deliverances that lie and await in the phenomenal refuges which are naturally created, like ravines, when the vortex that make turbulent the abysses of chaos retreat.

Umberto Eco's ambition to re-open the works of art and of criticism alike (his idea of an "open work" or "opera aperta" in Italian).

Far from being an attempt to outline a "reasonable paganism", on the contrary, the article is a (re)fine(d) irony (slightly deconstructivist because it is elegant and discreet or at least postmodernly-demured) directed against reason and against the ways in which it still is compatible, or can still be said to be able to recover "safely" (that is, inside a recognizable and academically-accreditable discourse) some deep structures of the instinct and of the archetypal abysses that pond threateningly within us, along seriously distressing mind-sloughs, until they inevitably erupt.

Considering the exacerbated rationalism of the 18th century, the discussion on reason, approached here slightly postmodernly, will be "reduced" to affirming that reason is an indispensable methodology, but still a much too poor and an obviously insufficient one for a convincing rendering of the grave level-differences or of the crevices which appear in man's psyche and soul when he begins wandering about how to re-conquer some holy lairs of the self.

Here the discussion about reason begins to be reduced already to one about a mandatory, but still a "backgroundish" structure (so to say, to a simple "principle of balance" of the aesthetical and phenomenological whorls which, however, never exceeds its function by jumping into the foreground and by dictatorially oppressing the evolving structures from there, through its rigidities [as it usually happens in modal logic]) that only sustains the dark and the diabolically-reptilian revealing stylistics.

Reason can thus be used elegantly and liberally as it is the case with Montesquieu (as I was saying, as a background-principle for a balanced stylistic of the self and of its projections within the discourse), purely methodologically as it happens with Rousseau, or downright in a barbarically-resentful style (that is, as an ostentatious and tyrannically-intolerant foreground, as a displacement that consumes its anomaly and its inadvertence with a total and truly brutal indifference to the frail concealments from the unique details), as it appears at Voltaire.

What links the four thinkers is an uncertain (paganly-confusing) dance (heretical [Voltaire], apostatical [Diderot, Montesquieu] or juridical and formal [Rousseau]) around reason and around the shy ways in which it can still make a decent peace with the already betrayed, forgotten and "hijacked"/diverted (from their substantializing and essentializing savour) instincts.

The article is therefore a plea for the necessity of an atavic elegance in the use of reason, as a prerequisite to the subsequent aesthetics of the instinct – one not founded rationally but "just" *started* ("*dishevelled*" or "*decanted*") rationally, in a first phase, and prepared in this way for future evolutions in thinking that will invent a reason of their own or, maybe will "only" know how to relocate the resources of reason within other rhizomes of the instinct, in such a way that the force of life, the Eros that Marcuse later spoke about, would be the one that governs *the stallion of reason* and that frames it a human elegance: like a horse that dances.

The dance of this horse is the dance of the demon of theory inside us, the instinct brought to the predatory purity of the elegance of the style (which only here

becomes the equivalent of the man that handles it[1]), the graciously-perfect beast in its possessive and a-historical veilings. Looking back at the 18th century through the eyes of the modern man, we can realize that Reason can only still be today the harmony and the symmetry from the dance of this horse, from the dance of the perfect beast (redemptively found once more and maturely introjected) – Reason as the rhythm of the elegance but not as the elegance of the rhythm.

[1] Georges-Louis Leclerc's (Comte de Buffon's) "Le style c'est l'homme même".