Michel Camus  *The Serpent of Priapus*,
The French was to appear in ‘Obliques’
but never appeared

Open “Roberte ce soir” in order to find, more diagonally than by chance, an example of Klossowskian obliquity: Roberte grappling with the colossus and the dwarf. Assymetry between the spaniel-headed hunchback dwarf and the colossus in erection.

The colossus speaks. A frankly metaphysical speech: pure spirit, inate forms, God, double substance, love of silence, hatred of speech, death … A speech, as it were, detached from the body. A pure language of significance.

What takes place during this speech?

“At the words, Roberte is unaware whether it is out of shame that she shivers because the enormous, boiling sentence has been passed between her buttocks, or whether it is out of pleasure that she sweats, because this sentence forces wide her vacuum; but while the sedcontra penetrates the Inspectress to the point of confusing within her the stiffness of acquittal and the elasticity of penalty, Roberte was unable to foresee the movement made by the gauntlet which on the quidest of the Inspectress, in hideous erection …”

Obliquity intervenes into the overlapping of two languages (distance / coincidence) which slant and interpenetrate with such perversity that our ‘reader’ (the reading consciousness within us) slips imperceptibly from onto the other: from the colossus’ tongue declaring that the flesh is but a lure, to the lips of the hunchback swallowing the “unctuous insolence” of the quidest.

“Sedcontra” – “quidest”: dubious labels, more obscurantist than hermetic for the designation of ithyphallic genitals and clitoris. Nevertheless labels of reference. Beneath the change of names, the sexual object is the same, its mystery remains whole, it is what it is: one can touch it with one’s finger, take part in its intensity, make
it sacred or desecrate it, it remains no less unfathomable as regards consciousness for the eyes of the spirit opening up in the blinding obscurity of sex – wide open white eyes, their look directed inwards.

“Sentence”: more intense, more metaphorical, is more oblique. METAPHORICAL OBLIQUITY becomes pronounced when the sentence penetrates the Inspectress to the point of confusing within her “the stiffness of acquittal and the elasticity of penalty”.

What takes place during the execution?

The colossus speaks. A speaking speech introducing itself into the speech-image-of-the-act. Transversal passage from the distance of a language of significance to the simulacrum of coincidence of a language of reference, or else a metaphorical language in its intensification. A Pascalian diversion: one loses sight of the fact that language only speaks obliquely of its own distance in relation to the non-language of coincidence.

Everything in Klossowski is oblique: his theatre of society, his laws of hospitality, his art of digression and simulacrum, Antoine’s avuncular eroticism, Octave’s metaphysical voyeurism, the Belle Versaillaise, the flagrant obliquity of Roberte’s look as photographed by Pierre Zucca, and drawn by Pierre Klossowski in “La Monnaie Vivante” (Eric Losfeld 1970). Not only is her eye oblique, but also the imperceptible smile on her closed lips (sealed like a secret) which are never pursed or tense. A perversity of contrasts: as the body offers itself it pretends to protest as the look obliquely takes its distance. Solecism …

Klossowski gives a definition of a solecism which has no longer anything incorrect about it: “Some think that there exists a solecism in a gesture also: every time we express the opposite of what we say with a movement the head or the hand”. No longer anything incorrect if we recognize here the staging of our intimate contradic-
tions: distortions between our states of consciousness and our actions. A leitmotiv which becomes entwined within the three panels of the tryptic laws of hospitality.

In Roberte ce soir: “The skirt is burning, the body seems to be safe, but in fact it is the spirit which is burning within this body which Victor, supposedly to save it, is exhibiting”.

In la revocation: “This simultaneity of the moral repulsion and of the eruption of pleasure within the same soul, within the same body”.

In le souffleur: “The expression of the faces of the interlocutors never coincides with what they say to me”. (I have underlined).

There is obliquity of contrasts within this distortion of the solecism. Elastic definition of the obliquity: the contradictory dialectics of distance and coincidence. It is not a master key. Quartered by the bi-polar distortion of an inaccessible “I” and of an unfathomable “body”, the look of consciousness suffers from a *metaphysical obliquity*.

The very origin of the Klossowski’s solecism is oblique. I can discern it in “Les Méditations Bibliques de Hamann” from whence Klossowski picks out the paradoxical themes of *Dei dialectus solecismus* and of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. In “La Monnaie Vivante”, the summit of obliquity is a lack: the word “oblique” is never pronounced. This means to say that *obliquity of consciousness* has nothing to do with natural obliquity, such as the ecliptic, or the muscles of the abdomen, nor with the architectural obliquity: pyramids, stairs, gothic gables, etc.

A step backwards where whole sides of obliquity have remained in the shadows. The enigmatic smile of Roberte? If the smile is oblique, the laugh is not. Roberte does not laugh: this is her strength, the sign of her perversity and her mastery. Does one imagine
Leonardo da Vinci painting his Joconda while she is dying of laughter? If humour is oblique, the mood is not. This is to say that the oblique is willingly opposed to its opposite. The enigma is oblique because it calls upon us to elucidate and comprehend it. The mystery is not oblique because it is that which comprehends and embraces us.

Although it is oblique, the look of Roberte does not arouse suspicion. It does not underline a fault of rectitude. It is rather a sign of detachment of consciousness testing, that is to say, experimenting, its desire not to be troubled by anything. It seems to be saying, as does Maitre Eckhart: “I praise detachment more than any love”. For if the detachment is oblique, the attachment is not.

I have spoken of Roberte’s perversity. In short the entire Psychopathia Sexualis is oblique. Any sexual perversions which diverges from the right path of procreation and reproduction of the species is oblique. If eroticism is oblique, natural (that is to say animal or, if need be, bestial) sexuality is not; it is not oblique in spite of organic obliquity of male-and-female sex. The hyphens show that once separated, each one is merely a semi-sex. There are statistics to be found in the Kinsey Report on thyphallic obliquity. The average angle – calculated for all ages – is very slightly above the horizontal; after this, 15 or 20% of men can avail themselves of an angle of more than 45°; 8 to 10% manifest almost vertical tendencies. Many of them will in old age decline to angles below the horizontal line. No sextant (Jean-Pierre Brisset would write “sexe-temps” or “sexe-tant”) has yet been discovered to measure the intimate obliquity of women. If the sexual organ is oblique, its function will not always be so: the sharp rise in the demographic growth proves this. This is the reason of the double obliquity of eroticism. There is
obliquity on the secondary level, a level of consciousness which goes against nature.

Enough said about Roberte this evening! May as well dismiss the Roberte/Klossowski couple in order to retain only the epileptic quintessence of its obliquity: the mysterious relation of distance/coincidence of a look which is perpetually looked at/looking. Start from scratch. All intentional digression is oblique. Let us forget Roberte to "oblique" elsewhere, in all senses of the word. . .

Is the erotic cinema oblique? Thierry Zeno’s film, Vase de Noces, presented at the TEF on the 30th May 1975 during the Critic’s Week, is the love story of a rather silly adolescent and a sow. A case of pathological zoophilory? Not all. The scene in which Dominique Garny (the only “human” actor in the film, for the sow – complacent in everything – is a great actress) makes love to her, has nothing erotic about it, nothing moving, nothing disturbing. The lover on heat straightforwardly penetrates her, without ambiguity or obliquity. This sexual act seems quite natural with a few touches of animal tenderness. By his refusal of culture and his regression towards the most absolute nature, where the image speaks so as to make speech unnecessary, Vase de Noces is not, at first approach, an oblique film, even though la vase and le vase are full of several simultaneous meanings, including the coprophagous and the coprolithic. For the “raw” in oneself is not oblique nor is the “cooked” separate from the “raw”. Nevertheless this regression of Vase de Noces in the non-human disproportion of the “raw” is less infantile than it is deliberate; it is even consciously cultural contrari-wise and therefore: the obliquity of the film exists an another level. Must there be seen an obliquity of pro-vocation?

Obliquity is cold delirium, a controlled vertigo. To let the inclination veer towards delirium while controlling
it, is to leave the straight line for an unknown trajectory, to leave the vicious circle in order to go out on a tangent … Are you for or against the death penalty? If you are against it, you will die all the same. If you are for it, is it for you or for others? As for us, you and me, the obliquity of our looking inwards is due to our incapability of looking straight at our own death, for it is our death who looks at us.

Death is not oblique: it is the abolition of distance within coincidence. At least let us hope so. For nothing is certain in this Wonderland. For in this perfect emptiness everything is a mirage. In the tombs of ancient Egypt, the boat of the death uses the diagonal way which is called the “Path of Secret Things”. This Book of the Dead has nothing reassuring about it, quite the contrary. It is true that we are assured of nothing. But since our agony began with our birth, we should not be displeased by its coming to an end with our death. An oblique definition of Wonderland: no man’s land …

Head on, objects cannot be grasped. Obliquity is to penetrate with a bias. The body of man set down in the Pythagorean pentagram is centered on the sexual organs. The arms are horizontal; the legs are spread open, oblique. Since the head is eccentric, the look will therefore be oblique since it goes from the periphery of the circle to the centre of the sexual organs. The head is lunar in relation to the sun of the sexual organs. All that radiates is oblique. There exists within Nadja an obliquity of radiation. “Without a shaft of shadow, without a shaft of light” (note by André Breton added to Nadja in 1962).

To move forward diagonally, one must let the inclination drift while maintaining the same direction.

While one of the earth’s hemispheres is lit by solar light, it seems that the other is in darkness. The unlit hemisphere is supposedly coiffed with a cone of shadow.
which projects itself into the stellar light. This cone of shadow has caused the delirium of generations of occultists. Stanislas de Guaita reproduces its diagram in “La Clef de la Magie Noire” (p.657 vol. II Essais de Sciences Maudites). A malevolent reservoir ... worse than hell! This astronomical cone of shadow is the origin of the belief in the devil’s obliquity. As consciousness is related to the body, the devil establishes distance in relation to coincidence. One says, “go to the devil”, “live with the devil” etc. Julien Gracq says: “the devil is oblique”. Talleyrand was not nicknamed “The Limping Devil” for nothing ... All that pertains to sorcery is oblique: the witch’s broom, the psychoanalytical transfer, Quetzalcoatl, the Kundalini, the drug experiments of Aldous Huxley and Michaux, the devil’s grass experimented by Carlos Castaneda. In the eyes of the sorcerer Yaqui, shadow is alive within a living, heterogenous and anisotropic space.

Shadow is oblique.

By wearing a conical hat covered with stars, the ancient astrologists revealed the secret of their consciousness’ sidereal obliquity. The inward look can only be sidereal if it breaks the wall of the shadow’s projection in order to open up onto the stars. Astrology, by its analogous method of reading, is oblique. If the “analogous” is oblique, “Logos” is not.

By opposing what is oblique to what is not, I will say very quickly that the following are oblique: narcissistic masturbation in front of a mirror, whether it be sexual or intellectual; the pill; fetishism; sexual initiation; magia sexualis; the attraction of love; Fourier’s pivotal love as the seed of a polygamous monogamy and of a polyandric monoandry; assymetry; the avuncular; Sisyphus and Prometheus; the xith card of the Tarot; all glances in so far as they are conscious of sweeping only a certain angle of vision in the infinity of the world; a shot fired at a
distance; poison; the evil eye; a voting paper. The following are not oblique: the guillotine (in spite of the chamfered edge of the blade); the work of mass-production; dictatorship; procreation; defecation; the Pope; impalement; plumb-line; the Editions Plon; filiation; the Inquisition; the most classic of Greek art; symmetry; reasoning reason etc.

In order to avoid multiplying the examples, we could: ... seek the origin of obliquity in the myths. I am thinking of the serpent of the Genesis. The serpent coils in a spiral around the tree radiating life. This oblique circumambulation of the serpent is the opaque bark which hides unity beneath duality, the tree of life beneath the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How should we renew contact with the “sap” whose serpent is the guardian of the threshold, a guardian which is cold by the great poet Jean Carteret in the most oblique terms: “the guardian of the best with the face of the worst”? Between sex and consciousness there exists a tantric obliquity with double contrary inclinations. Sex is mortis et vitae locus. The serpent is analogous to the sexual organs and to the devil. Although staying within sex in cavernis et tenebris locis, the serpent is simultaneously healing and death-healing. It is also the guardian of the tree of the Hesperides. Even in the mythologies anterior to Christianity, verticality and obliquity come together within the tree and the serpent, the tree embraced by the serpent, particularly in pre-Columbian art. On the other hand, the alchemic arbor philosophica symbolises the coincidence of the tree and the serpent; they are no more than one as the drawing of a 17th century manuscript in the British Museum shows: the tree, surrounded by the sun and the moon, bursts forth instead of the penis of a man lying on his back. At the base of the penis, the mercurius is the “sap” of the philosophical tree. Distance is not abolished in
the coincidence, but the distance is inside the coincidence.

... tie the principle of non-obliquity to the principle of Aristotle’s identity according to which a cat is a cat or \( a = a \). However, the following would be oblique: Bachelard’s “La Philosophie du Non”; the YIN-YANG and YANG-yin or the double contradiction dialectics of the ancient Chinese; the identity-of-opposites in Mao Tsetung’s dialectics: particularly in his treatise “Of Contradiction”; the principle of non-identity according to which a mountain is a non-mountain; Alfred Korzybski’s Non-Aristotelian systems and general semantics; Husserl’s noetico-noematic structure; the inversion of the inversion in Abellio’s absolute structure; the “yes-No” poetics; “I is Another” of Rimbaud; Novalis’ equation of “I=non-I”; Roger-Gilbert Lecomte’s paradoxes “I am not of my opinion” and “my left hand is a right foot”, amongst others, for every poet has oblique blood, and the first is Lautreamont. As for the “Bateau Ivre”!

... make relative the obliquity of terms by the equation of their relations. The word “cat” is not a cat. By its distance, language is always a simulacrum of coincidence. At the extreme, compared to non-language, all language is oblique, whether it be political or poetic. The equation of such a proposition is based on the following proportion: consciousness is to the body what distance is to coincidence what language is to non-language.

The proportion, which obeys the principle of the identity of the contrary relation and to the dialectic obliquity of the terms, suggests the relativity and the non-identity of each of them.

The equation

\[
\text{consciousness} = \text{distance} = \text{language}
\]

body coincidence non-language

would instigate exhaustless diagonal developments …
I have mentioned the obliquity of provocation. There are however differences between “Open your legs!”, a barely oblique (except in certain cases) way of courting a woman, and the “death is the purpose of life” of Baudelaire’s stunning and direct way of expressing a truth which is infinitely oblique. There also exists the obliquity of the pun. By moving straight forward in the vacuity of fullness, language goes around in circles. In the fullness of emptiness all directions (meditation as paradoxal sleep) are oblique: they are directed towards … the centre-of-non-language.

After all, when his last hour comes, the man or the woman is never the writer, nor even the reader, but is the oblique reading of his or her own death. The most oblique literary measures taken, and I am far from taking them, would consist mainly in not creating literature, or in creating it only in order to destroy language …

To sign off “obliquely yours” would be to speak straightforwardly. The meaning of obliquity is a secret of the heart deprived of all language, which even language itself does not touch. Nevertheless one makes allusions to it. Here, for example, is an oblique signature, a suggestion that everyone can make while knowing that it is more enigmatic than the naive question of the Sphinx: “I would be mad enough to be tied up”, said Michel Camus one day, “if I thought I were Michel Camus”.

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