WAS THE MODERN COSMOPOLIS TRANSFORMED INTO A POST-MODERN GLOBAL VILLAGE?

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Abstract: *I argue in this paper that the shift from modernity to post-modernity was accompanied by a deep change of some presuppositions shared by all the people who belong to this tradition. Following Stephen Toulmin's idea about the age of modernity from his book Cosmopolis, the Hidden Agenda of Modernity, I try to reveal that post-modernity replaces the so-called project of Cosmopolis with that of a global village. In other words, there is a difference between what we want to build and what we have built in fact. The main reason for this process is the invasion of a new kind of subjectivity in all areas of social life.*

Prologue: post-modernity and postmodernism, two in one

When we think about future, we do it in a *horizon of expectations* framework. Our beliefs and foresights are shaped by the limits of present because we want to do and we want to decide to do only desirable things. In this sense, our capacity to forecast is limited and any imaginable future will look like the present. Therefore, I don't want to make here a prediction about the course of events in the future, but only to describe a trend and to explain on this basis what has happened and, insofar the future looks like the past, to announce a possible future. Anyway, although we take the past as an ally, the idea about the future must be viewed as a product of speculative imagination, because, as we know from Hume, we have no reliable epistemological reason to think that things will be like as in the past.

The question from the title of this study is put forward as a weak commitment for an answer. As we know, a questions contains itself a selected answer, it is a constraint or a framework for uncertain possibilities. The project of Modernity was equated by Toulmin with the project of a Cosmopolis: starting with the 17th century "humanity seemed to have set aside all doubts and ambiguities about its capacity to achieve its goals here on Earth, and in historical time, rather than different human fulfilment to an Afterlife in Eternity – that was what had made the project of Modernity

rational – and this optimism led to major advances not just in natural science but in moral, political and social thought…"[116] If the Cosmopolis was a philosophical or an ideological construct of Modernity and we accept this idea as an unproblematic statement, then my main aim here is to describe this state of fact and to offer an approach for the so-called state of arts in the present, in times of a new cultural age, post-modernity. And the new question is if the Cosmopolis is still available or it was demolished by the architects of post-modernity. I prefer to use the expression *post-modernity* as a name for a process with at least two phases, modernity and post-modernity, and to let aside the expression *postmodernism*. The two, post-modernity and postmodernism, overlap and have in common a hard core, but differ as type of succession: post-modernity is a new form of modernity, postmodernism is another age, it is a case of secession, even a clash with modernity, not just a simple succession. Post-modernity is a new phase of modernity in the same tradition or an effect of modernity, postmodernism is a destruction of modernity or of so-called weak modernity, if we may use Vattimo's idea about weak thought and his nihilistic reading of history.[117]

What relation is then between the modern Cosmopolis and the global village? First of all, I think that globalization is the end of modernity, only of modernity, not of history, as Fukuyama stated.[118] This means that the old Kantian ideal about a common peaceful world was fulfilled in this manner, as a global world, even if somebody may not like this or may not recognize in it a Kantian ideal. Kant wanted to change the world through the forces of peace, rationality and law, first of all. This historical project was the basis of modern society with the national state as a cell of global order. However, the technological evolution and the market economy changed the society and the national state became something old fashioned. The new aim is a global order based on transnational processes and the new brave world looks like a village, like a global village in which every person can know almost everything, if she or he wants, about everybody. We, the citizens of global village have in common new values and try to live together, face to face, connected to mass-media, ready to take a job in the benefits of our global community. Is this a real picture or just another ideological movement? Let's see!

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[116] Toulmin, 1992, p. IX.
[117] See Vattimo, 1991, for this nihilistic understanding of our history.
[118] See Fukuyama, 1992.

Secession and succession: a terminological debate or a real change of the world?

The debate about the changing world began in architecture after the First World War regarding the new style proposed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and then by some of his contemporaries, among them Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. Their minimal buildings, made from steel and glass, guided by the principle that *less means more*, became a new pattern, the so-called *skin and bones* design, for the architectural development of cities/towns and for urban planning. This anonymous simplicity has as a result the lack of specificity and a similarity in high degree between the public buildings, especially those for offices. This style was named Modern, because it was conceived as a style of Modern times, in opposition with the Classical style of Antiquity and the Gothic style of Medieval Age.

After the 1970, a new generation of architects and designers, with Robert Venturi as leader, appeared. They tried to give back to architecture the imagination, especially the historical references and decorative elements. Their criticism against modernity wasn't in fact a critique of modernity as a whole, but just this particular movement in architecture initialized by Mies and named modernism. Therefore, the postmodernism in its first phase is a particular movement and has as its aim only to stop and to surpass or to overcome the modernism in architecture. It wasn't its aim to finish with modernity or to replace modernity with something like post-modernity.

On the other hand, understood as a critique of modernity, the postmodernism undermines the authority of modern tradition and that of modern institutions. First of all, the idea of universality is under attack because the new preferred approaches are the deconstruction and the analysis of little fragments. As a cultural movement, the postmodernism is opposite to modernity. In literature, postmodernism has leaded in the end to the break with the realism and chosen to explore and to enter into the inner space of conscience or in the virtual space of dreams. Writers as Joyce and Fowles ceased to describe objectively the facts and use the subtle capacities of language in order to express thoughts, actions and attitudes. The term postmodernism was used by Jean Francois Lyotard in the year 1979 in his book *La condition post-moderne*. Is postmodernism something new in philosophy, entirely different from modernity? Using the Wittgesteinian model of language games, Lyotard has tried to describe the new rules of the postmodern age. In *Stanford Encyclopedia,* postmodernism is defined as a set of critical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality in order to destabilize concepts such

as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic reality, and the univocity of meaning. Do the postmodernists use a new list of speech acts? Not even if we take into account the style of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The critiques of philosophical systems built after a Hegelian pattern is one of the common job of postmodern philosophers. In the same time, any subjective approach, like that used by Nietzsche in his theory of values, is considered at least a sign of the post-modernity.

Some philosophers think that there is a secession war between modernity and post-modernity, a violent separation and a clash between tradition and the new age of postmodernism. Two of them are E. M. Cioran and Michel Henry. Both of them have described the contemporary times as an age of barbarians. Cioran wrote in terms of a deep gap between us and modern tradition: "We no longer have a past, or rather, there is nothing left of the past which is our own, no longer a chosen country, no longer salvation, no refuge in yore. Our prospects? Impossible to distinguish them, we are barbarians without a future."[119] Michel Henry[120] has described the secession like a fight between good and evil. The ideal aims of modernity, the universal and objective science and the quest for truth led to the elimination of subjectivity and sensibility from culture and society. Although science isn't bad through itself, it became a social and cultural monster because it promoted a way of life without humanism, without the values of subjectivity, therefore, without real life, namely, without art, religion and ethic. In fact, science and technology have no ethic because they are objective.

Therefore, as a reaction against bad objectivity, some people think that the first move on the way to postmodernism belongs to Kant and is related with his "Copernican Revolution": the subjectivity was rediscovered, the knowing subject was put in the spotlight and the object was put in dependence from the subject. Objectivity becomes in Kantian terms objectivity in a week sense, namely, transcendental subjectivity. Remembering Vatimo's idea about week thought we could summarize that all the modern strong claims for objectivity and universalism were put into question by postmodernism.

Shortly speaking, the term "modern" is asymmetrical. After Latour, it is doubly asymmetrical because "it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished."[121] I think we can also apply this idea to the word "postmodernism". This means that we could speak about a translation and a

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[119] Cioran, 1998, p. 89.
[120] See Henry, 1987.
[121] Latour, 1993, p. 10.

purification in the passage from modernity to postmodernism. But it isn't here the place for such a discussion about humans, things and hybrids. Anyway, after Latour modernity is a double process, a *translation*, on the one hand, and a *purification*, on the other hand. Through translation, we create new types of beings; through purification, we create two distinct ontological zones, nature and culture.

The modern Cosmopolis

The general framework of understanding is given by the idea that the struggle for social and political stability interact with the quest for scientific and intellectual certainty and stability in the modern Cosmopolis from the beginning.[122]

But, first of all, the modern Cosmopolis was a social project. The idea of a change in modern tradition, especially in society, politics and economy was taken into account by Stephen Toulmin in his book, *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. His thesis is that, at the beginning of modernity, in Descartes's times, the issues of certainty, rational consensus and necessity weren't just some challenges for philosophy, but they were also responses to practical and historical challenges, first of all, the need for a new social and political order after the Thirty Year War. The general crisis (economic and social, intellectual and spiritual) in the early 17th century broke the public confidence in the older consensus and the Age of Modernity was in fact an effect of several different attempts to build a new one.

In the year 1965, Peter Drucker has published the book *Landmarks for Tomorrow* in which he has expressed the belief that we had to make a difference between the sovereign national state in the age of modernity, understood as a political and economic unity, formed in the seventeenth century, and the new type of transnational institutions who serve to some transnational aims. The loyalty for national state is replaced with transnational interest. The national language as a sign of identity became sometimes an obstacle.

This social project has some deep philosophical roots. The Cartesian program leads philosophy into a dead end. In a Cartesian world which has its own intellectual goals, first of all, to make clear our ideas and to gain certainty step by step by rational proof, rhetoric was subordinated to formal logic: "the validity and truth of *rational* arguments is independent of *who* presents them, to whom or in what context – such rhetorical questions can contribute nothing to impartial establishment of human knowledge. For the

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[122] Toulmin, 1992, p. 92.

first time since Aristotle, logical analysis were separated from, and elevated for above the study of rhetoric, discourse and argumentation."[123] The basic Cartesian distinction was the Mind-Body dichotomy and as a result of this was the distinction between the rational freedom and the causal necessity, between the word of human experience and the word of natural phenomena.

An interesting topic related with these changes of the world is the link between science and modernity. Was science the most fruitful creation of modernity? What could we say about the reciprocal relations between science, technological development and industrial revolution as a whole? Most of the thinkers of that times thought that the development of science was the sign of the new age of modernity. Few of them, as William Blake and Friedrich Schiller, cautioned about the "inhuman" nature of Newtonian science.

Regarding the educational institutions, it is important to mention that the culture of modern Cosmopolis was socially divided into two parts or two traditions. Therefore, the university training given to the higher civil servants or to the administrative group had as background literature, Latin language and philosophy, while the engineers were trained on the exact sciences.[124]

The Cartesian dichotomy interacted with the need for absolute claims. The modern Cosmopolis was thereby built based on some such claims:

− the new European system of states was built on the absolute claims to nationhood;

− the new political balance of power was built on the claims to stability;

− the new system of social relations within each nation was built on the basis of a new horizontal social class structure;

− the new science was built on the absolute claims to certainty.

And all these steps were the result of a rational conduct to the aim of objectivity.

A new subjectivity

The relationship between modernity and rationality seems to be without any doubt the hard core of any approach. But this new order of modern Cosmopolis based on rational control over nature and society, rules and hierarchy, had some unexpected consequences at the levels of social structure and personal subjectivity.

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[123] Toulmin, 1992, p. 75. Similar ideas, as Toulmin himself has mentioned, may be found in Dewey, 1930, Rorty, 1979.Anyway, the question "Why did educated people find the quest for certainty so attractive?" become in the end a Cartesian rhetorical statement.

[124] See Snow, 1998.

First of all, it is impossible to rationalize and control everything. For example, in the modern society some groups cannot be controlled and administrated. The persons belonging to these groups are perceived as strangers. Bauman understand the stranger as a person who is unfamiliar and because of these is seen as a threat. In the same time, another source of uncertainty is globalization because we are not able to direct events while our affairs take place in a global market on a global scale.[125] Secondly, our society transforms a society of producers to a society of consumers. This shift from modernity to post-modernity assures more freedom for the individuals, but as consumers, not as citizens. They have the freedom to consume and to enjoy their lives. Third, as I have mentioned above, the social quest for certainty transformed scientific knowledge into a pattern for all the other intellectual activities. The universal and objective truth become the main goal of science and this process leads to a new type of subjectivity, let's name it a subjectivity without sensibility. According to Henry, in our barbarian times, science tends to exclude or to minimize art, religion and ethics.

Therefore, the modern Cosmopolis was built on the values of tolerance, reciprocity and trust in a world of certainty and stability. But how did we react against the different threats, for example, when we met the stranger or when we are the strangers? The individuals try to invent or to discover new ways of life and new organizational frames in order to reduce the uncertainty and insecurity. In fact, we passed, in Bauman's terms, from a solid modernity to a liquid modernity.[126] Social forms of life and institutions haven't enough time to solidify and the individuals need to switch from one choice to another. The result of this social metamorphosis is described by Bauman: "Insecurity affects us all, immersed as we all are in a fluid and impredictable world of deregulation, flexibility, competitiveness and endemic uncertainty, but each one of us suffers anxiety on our own, as a private problem, an outcome of personal failings and a challenge to provide our *savoir/faire* and agility. We are called, as Ulrich Beck has acidly observed, to seek biographical solutions to more systematic contradictions: we look for individual salvation from shared troubles."[127]

On the other hand, as Antonio Gramsci has observed in a brilliant remark, "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the

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[125] See Bauman, 1991.
[126] See Bauman, 2000.
[127] Bauman, 2001, p. 144.

new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."[128] There are many levels of this crisis, but the most important is that of Western culture as a totality. This interregnum when the modernity collapsed and the post-modernity was the new comer still unborn was perceived and described by the philosophers as a cultural crisis.

For example, Edmund Husserl, in his Vienna Lecture, which was held in May 1935, known under the title "The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy", wrote about the cultural roots of European crisis in the terms of the need for a humanistic reform after the fail of modern rationalistic culture: "The European nations are sick: Europe itself, it is said, is in crisis. We are by no means lacking something like nature doctors. Indeed, we are practically inundated by a flood of naïve and excessive suggestions for reform. But why do the so richly developed humanistic disciplines fail to perform the service here that is so admirably performed by the natural sciences in their sphere."[129] For Husserl, the new cultural movement must be a reiteration of the European spiritual shape under the supervision of Humanities, because, without any doubt, "our surrounding world is a spiritual structure in us and in our historical life."[130] We could also mention the approach proposed by Oswald Spengler in his controversial book *The Decline of the West*.[131] Although I do not entirely share the content of Spengler's thesis, I think that the postmodern subjectivity is due to a spiritual crisis and that the roots of it are in the quest for objectivity and certainty. Among others, the cynical nature of modern civilization gave rise to a new attitude towards the uses of technologies.

Mass-media and the new neighbourhood

Lyotard noted in his book about the postmodern condition that the computer and new technologies have transformed knowledge into information. This means that knowledge has been reduced to its propositional dimension, more accurate, to semantic information. Knowledge is seen as a final product split from the process by which the knowing subject obtained it. We can manage information as a useful thing with a market value, but all these technologies and commercial operations have no connection with the knower's feelings. As a result, we can build different language games, using multiplicity of meanings and the diversity of subjective understanding.

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[128] Gramsci, 1971, p. 276.
[129] Husserl, 1970, p. 269.
[130] Husserl, 1970, p. 170.
[131] See Spengler, 1926.

But another effect of new technologies is the so-called suspension of space. Using the computer and the virtual web we can be in real time connection with any person, we can see his or her pictures, we can change impressions about an event, being in a state of neighbourhood, without borders or other obstacles. We can learn almost anything about anyone from anywhere in the world. Bauman has tried to show how the computers produced the decline of traditional public space.[132]

Instead of a Cosmopolis and an order of national states, we have a network of people who are connected like in a global village. It is easy to travel far and wide so that the planet became a common space for all its citizens. We live in a world in which time is accelerated and space is compressed. But even under apparently conditions for an unlimited access to Internet, the global village suffers from the so-called "digital divide": different groups of a community or society haven't an equal access to new technologies. Moreover, we could speak also about a global digital divide on an international scale between developing and developed countries. If we take into account the content, which is transmitted, then we can identify a second level digital divide between the producers and the consumers of content. So, the global village, far from being an open space, lead to further internal fragmentation.

According to Henry, in mass-media we find the highest expression of barbarism because the subjectivity and the sensibility are minimized, deleted and replaced by technical procedures in the name of communicational efficiency. For example, television reduces life to an event. A suicide becomes an event for the prime times news and the journalists don't pay any attention and respect to the human despair or to the human dignity. Television reduces all events to incoherent and insignificant facts.

Henry claims that the mass-media is the best example of mediocrity in social life. Mass-media becomes in time the root of the evil. Although initially mass-media seemed to be an element of a rational and free society, it was used as a means for social control Mass-media has become – let's use Marcuse's terms but without his ideological commitment – a source of one-dimensional man. The question raised by Marcuse becomes an exercise in rhetoric: "Can we really distinguish between the mass-media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?"[133]

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[132] See Bauman, 1998.
[133] Marcuse, 1964, p. 8.

A new agenda

Is there an antidote to all these? I will try to portray a modest and minimal improving way to overcome the bottlenecks. In the paragraph "From Leviathan to Lilliput"[134], Toulmin asserts that we need a new intellectual agenda that binds us to shift the focus from stability and system to adaptability and function. For instance, sovereign nation state has led to inequality at the international level. We need to take into account the sub and transnational levels and to consider seriously multinational institutions and procedures.

The things already have happened in this way in science. We passed from a disciplinary approach to subdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives. We have given up looking for a universal method and we make science in a new mode, opened to the context and centred on the needs of society.[135]

Undoubtedly, we are dealing with a change in all areas of society. But what have we to do if we want to do the best? Toulmin notes some trends, philosophically supported, that could be seen as a revival of culture.

Let's enumerate them:

− Return to timely. Philosophy worked traditionally with universal timeless questions but it's time to look at this strategy with scepticism. Even if our goal is to describe the order in Nature, it is a mistake to describe everything in terms of stability and hierarchy, using the pattern of cosmology. Biology, for example, suggests a discourse in terms of adaptation. Anyway, we don't deal only with abstract ideas, but also with fresh and blood human beings. Like in clinical medicine, we must follow the "course" of a disease and to change the procedure.[136]

− Return to the oral tradition. In the last decades, the text was recontextualized after a long period of decontextualization. Modernity keeps the text as such in its letter and the moderns focused over the rationality and meaning of different parts of language, preferably, over the printed text. But the return to oral language means the revival of discourse, rhetoric and communication. The philosophical movement from *propositions* to *utterances*, *speech* and *forms of life* was made gradually by Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, Gadamer and Habermas. The logical validity remains important but it doesn't capture anything from the linguistic interactions between subjects in the context of discourse. Moreover, the reasoning itself depends on its context.

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[134] Toulmin, 1992, p. 192 and the next.

[135] For a larger debate on this topic see Gibbons *et al.*, 1994.

[136] For this analogy see Toulmin, 1992, p. 189.

– The return to the particular. Modern Science has imposed the idea that knowledge is equal with the discovery and the understanding of universal. A scientific experiment must be intersubjective testable in order to be available. But the temptation to generalize was challenged, first of all, by moral philosophers. They discussed the so-called ethics case and rediscovered the casuistical traditions. Life isn't something abstract, real processes aren't just effects of essences and actions aren't entirely the results of pure rational decisions. Applied ethics is as important as moral philosophy.

– The return to the local. Modern philosophers thought that human nature is universal and we needn't use our time for ethnographical or anthropological studies. The factual realities and the cultural differences don't matter in the search for the truth about human person and peoples. But this view was overturned. Researchers are now taking into account the facts in their local context in trying to reconstruct the historical forms of life in their uniqueness.

In my view, one way to unify and to save all these returns or reversions is to rediscover the nature and to overcome the modern dichotomy between nature and culture. The global village would be really designed starting from the natural dimensions of our life on our planet. In this respect, the environmental movement belongs to post-modernity. As environmental patterns of thought, I could mention Barry Commoner's book *The Closing Circle* or *Silent spring* manifesto published by Rachel Carson and the idea of a "deep ecology" launched by Arne Naess. If we judge positively and optimistic, then we could claim that the modern Cosmopolis could be really replaced in an ecologist way by a global village. As the environmentalists say, we are all in the same boat.

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