

first publication

1 Abrams, Philip: Historical Sociology. New York: Cornell UP 1983, p. 8.

2 The reflections that I have chosen to expose in this article are part of the preliminary research that I conducted to define a topic for my dissertation. Rooted in Modern modes of representations, this reflection will focus on some of the epistemological questions from which my research proposal arose and which also provide an analytical framework for my research.

Doing justice to the reality of history is not a matter of noting the way in which the past provides a background to the present; it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future out of the past, of seeing that the past is not just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed.¹

Ontological by nature, the question of time is one of the two paradigms, along with space, on which human beings base their understanding of their place and purpose in their surrounding environment. Though, these questions have been constant points of interest and prolific domains of intellectual activity, the latest »age« of Mankind referred to as »modernity«, itself a human construct, has been particularly prolific in reflections on the more specific question of »time.«² When dealing with the concept of »modernity«, one faces two major points of disagreement in the scholarly debate with its definition – the time of origination and the meaning of the word itself. In fact, these two issues are closely related since without a common understanding of the word, no temporal approximation is possible.

As the rupture with an older system of beliefs, »modernity« symbolizes the advent of a new episteme, a new »project« for Mankind. Part of the problem is the necessity to separate the different domains of knowledge, each of which – politics, religion, sciences, arts, and philosophy – was affected differently in the course of history. Consequently, the interpretations by scholars vary substantially on the moment of its origination, some acknowledging its existence strictly as the latest development in human history, others as being a cyclical process triggered by significant societal as well as epistemological changes, with an explicit reference to »La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes« of 1653-1714.

Originating by turns in the Elizabethan era, after the French Revolution, in the works of Descartes and Newton, Baudelaire or Nietzsche, the ideological as well as the conceptual roots characterizing Modernity are also subject to varying interpretations. However, they all acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, the impact of the development of sciences on the ethical, moral and ontological issues which (Western) societies face. How and why, the following reflection will try to highlight some of the ideological assumptions derived from and sustained by sciences in regards to the project of Modernity.

Modernity or the Perception of Change

Most of us remember or have learnt about the famous argument, which broke out between Modernists and Postmodernists in the late 1970's and early 1980's, between defenders of the Enlightenment project and more radical views objecting the Modernist orthodoxy. For those who don't, the two leading figures of the argument are Jürgen Habermas for the Modernists and Jean-François Lyotard for the Postmodernists. The former stood for *La Modernité: un projet inachevé* while the latter expressed – in *Réponse à la question: Qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?* – the necessity and the moral duty of the Postmodern artist to proceed to a severe reevaluation (»un sévère réexamen«) of Enlightenment.³

Much could be said about the arguments used by both camps, from »irrationalism«, »neo-conservatism«, »intellectual terrorism«, »nihilism«, and »cynicism« among others on one side to the denunciation of the »Auschwitz project«, expression used in *Note sur les sens de Post-4*, on the other side, Lyotard concluding his response to Habermas with a passionate engagement:

Beneath the general demand for relaxation and appeasement, we hear murmurings of the desire to reinstitute terror and fulfill the phantasm of taking possession of reality. The answer is this: war on totality. Let us attest to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differends and save the honor of the name.⁵

The sharp polarization shown by the vehemence of the argument should not obliterate the shared founding concept, which underlies the two positions. By entitling his article after a brief essay written in 1784 by Immanuel Kant – *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* – Lyotard deliberately grounded the debate in Kant's ontological reflection on Enlightenment. Kant, who is arguably the founding father of Modernity, is not necessarily famous for this spe-

3 Lyotard, Jean-François: The Postmodern Explained – Correspondence 1982-1985. Transl. and ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas. Minneapolis, London: Univ. of Minnesota Pr. 1992, p. 3.

4 Ibid., pp. 75-81.

5 Ibid., p. 16. Original: Lyotard, J.-F.: Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants. Paris: Galilée 1988, p. 32: »Sous la demande générale de relâchement et d'apaisement, nous entendons marmonner le désir de recommencer la terre d'accomplir le fantasme d'étendre la réalité. La réponse est: guerre au tout, témoignons de l'imprésentable, activons les différends, sauvons l'honneur du nom.«

6 Foucault, Michel: *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?* Dits et écrits. Tome IV. Paris: Gallimard 1994, pp. 562-578, here p. 33 [English: Foucault, M.: *What is Enlightenment*. In: Rabinow, P. (Ed.): *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books 1984, pp. 32-50].

7 Foucault 1984, p. 42. French: Foucault 1994, p. 571: » [...] souligner l'enracinement dans l'*Aufklärung* d'un type d'interrogation philosophique qui problématise à la fois le rapport au présent, le mode d'être historique et la constitution de soi-même comme sujet autonome [...] la réactivation permanente d'une attitude; c'est-à-dire d'un *ethos* philosophique qu'on pourrait caractériser comme critique permanente de notre être historique.«

8 Habermas, Jürgen: *La modernité, un projet inachevé*. In: *Critique* 37/413 (1981), p. 963: »les égarements qui ont marqué ce projet et des erreurs commises par d'abusifs programmes de dépassement.«

9 Ibid.: »[L]es arts et les sciences contribueraient non seulement au contrôle des forces naturelles, mais aussi à la compréhension du monde et à la connaissance de soi, au progrès moral, à la justice des institutions et même au bonheur des hommes.«

10 Foucault 1984, p. 45; French: Foucault 1994, p. 35: »dans ce qui nous est donné comme universel, nécessaire, obligatoire, quelle est la part de ce qui est singulier, contingent et dû à des contraintes arbitraires.«

11 Kuhn, Thomas: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr. 1970, 2nd ed. with postscript, questioned the idea of accumulation related to the history of sciences and advocated a new understanding of sciences. He demonstrated the damageable influence of thinking about sciences in terms of a linear process from which the idea of accumulation is directly derived. Instead, it would be more accurate to think in terms of changing paradigms, which build on each other only in the sense that they help uncover anomalies, which are then resolved by the elaboration of new questions and the advent of a new paradigm.

12 Dubois, Claude- Gilbert: *Moder- nité du 16e siècle français: «Nouvel- leté» ou renaissance? Ce que moder- nité veut dire*. Textes réunis et prés- entés par Yves Vadé. Bordeaux: Pr. Univ. de Bordeaux 1998.

13 Ibid., p. 33: »la nouveauté n'est qu'aléatoire, la modernité est struc- turelle.«

cific article, which is often assumed to be only a minor piece of work of his scholarly contribu- tion. However, his attempt to understand the present receives particular attention in the eyes of Michel Foucault who understands this article to be raising »la question [de] la pure réali- té.«⁶ His aim is not to understand the present from the totality of the past – unlike the per- spective exposed by Jürgen Habermas – nor is it to build a future but it is a reflection on the significance in his contemporary world of the ontological changes in the transition from »yes- terday« to »today«. By understanding the *Aufklärung* as the passage from the state of »mino- rity«, that is a state defined by the submission of the will to an authority in terms of knowled- ge, spirituality and science, to the state of »majority«, Kant embeds his reflection in two direc- tions – critical and historical. If Enlightenment is a process in the making, it is also according to Kant a task – i.e. the obligation for the individual to rethink his position ethically and poli- tically, spiritually and institutionally. Hence for Foucault the necessity to

emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical interpretation – one that si- multaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous object [...] the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.⁷

While acknowledging »The errings which characterized this project and errors committed by abusive programs overcoming this project« [transl. J-JD]⁸, Habermas defends the project of Enlightenment where »arts and sciences would contribute not only to the control of natural forces but also to the understanding of the world and to the knowledge of oneself, to moral progress, to the justice of the institutions and even to the happiness of mankind.«⁹ By defend- ing also the idea of democracy as being a never ending process, an »unachieved project«, Ha- bermas embraces two major concepts of Modernity – the teleological idea of a linear history leading to a perfectible future, which the progress made by science would help achieve. The critical stand advocated by Kant would therefore be used in a positive way to help fulfill the goals set by the project of Modernity.

Opposite to this ethical perspective, Foucault claims the right to reverse Kant's ethical is- sue about the limits that should be imposed on knowledge by questioning »in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, con- tingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints.«¹⁰ Lyotard's critical point of view partici- pates of the same attitude, which is the right and the necessity to formulate alternative represen- tations of reality. More than a century prior to Lyotard's publication, Charles Baudelaire had sensed the dangers of an inherently monolithic Modernist discourse and had already denounced the attempt by the dominant classes to operate collusion between scientific progress, high morals and strong ethics. Though the radical transformations undergone by Western societies necessarily moved them away from so-called »traditional societies«, the dynamic un- derstanding of a progressive evolution of societies was only possible through a combination of cumulative processes¹¹ such as the accumulation of wealth characteristic of a capitalist eco- nomy as well as the creation of scientific knowledge with the Judeo-Christian historical con- ception of salvation (Max Weber) to create the teleological impetus at the core of Western his- torical understanding. As Claude-Gilbert Dubois demonstrates in *Moder- nité du 16e siècle fran- çais: «Nouvelleté» ou renaissance?*¹², Montaigne's use of the concept of the modern as novelty is contingent and does not have any positive and dialectical and therefore no justified exis- tence in the course of Time, which allows him to conclude »novelty is unpredictable, modernity is structural.«¹³ [Trans. J-JD]

Though there can be no doubt about the impact of the scientific and technological contri- butions in the 16th and 17th century (Gutenberg, Copernic, Galileo, Gassendi, Newton just to na- me a few) on the arts and more specifically on the question of representation, it is not this es- say's task to demonstrate the ways new developments in the sciences affected the modes of representation of this particular era. Suffice it to say that sciences transmitted to the arts the notion of perfectibility of the representation, accumulation, and obsolescence of prior modes of representation as illustrated in this reflection by Charles Perrault: »Time helped discover several secrets in the arts, which, added to those that we inherited from the Ancients, made them more accomplished.« [Transl. J-JD]¹⁴ The idea of accumulation whether it be in the Arts or in Sciences is essential to the constitution of the »Enlightenment project« characterized by an epistemological tension towards the neo-platonic concept of truth. As Foucault sugge-



14 Gillot, Hubert: *La querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Genève: Slatkine Rep. 1968, p. 504.: »Le temps a découvert plusieurs secrets dans les arts, qui, joints à ceux que les Anciens nous ont laissés, les ont rendus plus accomplis.«

15 Foucault 1994, p. 78.

16 Froidevaux, Gérald: *Baudelaire, représentation et modernité*. Paris: José Corti 1989, p. 22: »la représentation du présent forme la loi cachée qui ordonne les échanges symboliques, la logique profonde qui régit désormais le champ culturel.«

17 Butchart, Alexander: *Anatomy of Power-European Constructions of the African Body*. London, New York: Zed Books 1998, p. 16.

18 Ibid., p. ix.

19 Habermas 1981, p. 965ff.

sted,¹⁵ along with scientific innovations in the 17th and 18th century a shift occurred from the Aristotelian tripartite concept of representation to a binary theory (present and absent), this concept being central to the new episteme.

In fact, there are good reasons to believe that the straight relationship between words and ideas or words and present ruled over the world of aesthetics – not to mention sciences – well beyond the 18th century. It is not until Baudelaire's *Le peintre de la vie moderne* that this classical concept was epistemologically challenged. If, as Gérald Froidevaux suggests, »representation of the present shapes the hidden law that orders the symbolic exchanges and the profound logic henceforth ruling over the cultural arena«¹⁶ [Transl. J-JD], I would like now to address some of the contemporary issues related to the legacy of sciences in both history and social sciences at large. The following part will be a case study of a Foucauldian approach to Postcolonial Studies and I will move in the last section to more theoretical considerations in the field of history and sociology.

Anatomy of Power – A Foucauldian Approach

Anatomy of Power by Alexander Butchart written in 1998 is a study which raises in many respects similar ontological questions – the one of our relation to the Present and the historical mode of Being. Interestingly enough, it is also one example of a Foucauldian approach to history. Interesting in a sense that the centeredness of Kant's reflections on the individual prefigures Foucault's considerations about the shift in the course of history towards a discourse centered on Man.

These three new sciences of Life, Labor and Language (biology, economics, and linguistics) defined a central object for the Modern episteme, namely what Foucault calls ›Man‹; and with the advent of man arose the specific studies of man in the form of the human sciences.¹⁷

As the title *Anatomy of Power – European Constructions of the African Body* clearly suggests through the figure of analogy, this study, rooted in postcolonial studies, »examines the relation between socio-medical practices as power and the resultant knowledges of the African body.«¹⁸ To achieve this purpose, Butchart goes back in time as far as the Renaissance period within the specific context of South Africa and looks at several organs of dissemination of power in a chronological (but not linear) order from the first accounts of the explorers to the accounts of missionary expeditions, the development of the mining industry, and finally to contemporary institutions and administrations such as the *Public Health* and the *Bantu Clinic*.

The systematic use of literary cultural artifacts (official sources, diaries, interviews) and the study of more practical types of discourses (both social and medical) along with Foucault's taxonomy and genealogical framework (borrowed from Nietzsche's ideas of descent and emergence) confer to this study a deep grounding in Cultural Studies and more specifically in New Historicism both in its theoretical orientations as well as in its »opposition« to Cultural Materialism. The difference between these two approaches in terms of the premises which define them is essential to understand the critics formulated by Butchart to contemporary Postcolonial Studies and consequently to the Cultural Materialist approach.

Where New Historicism focuses more on the concept of Power, discourse as a vector of power, and the construction of identity – therefore more in a deconstructive and poststructuralist perspective –, Cultural Materialism tends to target more specifically manifestations of power relations in terms of ideology, the role of institutions and dissidence. Thus, it is characterized by the predominance of Marxist as well as Gender, African-American, and Queer theories. Where the former tries to understand the incidence and the interplay of different types of discourses in the constitution of systems of truth and knowledge at a given time, the latter insists more on the historical evolution of the systems of oppression in order to understand general tendencies.

The moral and ethical stand embraced by Butchart participates in the spirit of Kant's notion of critical reasoning. Butchart swells the ranks of the skeptical with Lyotard and Foucault whom Habermas would probably incorporate into his three categories of conservatisms.¹⁹ Foucault's hobby horse, as he clearly identifies, is to »separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking, what we are,

20 Foucault 1984, p. 46. French: Foucault 1994, p. 574: »dégager de la contingence qui nous a fait être ce que nous sommes la possibilité de ne plus être, faire ou penser ce que nous sommes, faisons, ou pensons.«

21 Butchart 1998, p. 182.

22 Ibid., p. 183.

23 Ibid., p. 31.

24 Ibid., p. 10.

25 Ibid., p. 8. The concept of the ›history of the present‹ focuses on the production of knowledge and was motivated by new developments in the field of history based on the problem of explanatory anachronicity – the dyads of Lévi-Strauss – as incompatible with the goal of objectivity at the heart of the discipline of history.

26 Foucault 1994, p. 46.

27 Ibid., p. 14f.

28 Ibid., p. 238.

do, or think.«²⁰ By demonstrating the reality of the discursive construction of the African body, Butchart reaches conclusions which are without further right of appeal: »those who oppose the power of medicine with their calls for a humanist and psychologized alternative can at best triumph in a palace revolution only.«²¹ Clearly, this analysis reaches a more concrete realm and brings about some of the limitations of the poststructuralist »revolution« which dynamics of deconstruction are bound not by language itself but by what appears to be the quintessential dimension of language – its normative and performative function as discourse. Hence, the need according to Butchart to question not only discourse itself but »the micro-powers that produce these essential objects (such as the clinical examination, the epidemiological survey or the participatory research interview)...«²²

In this context, Butchart, following Foucault, isolates two types of power: Sovereign Power which relates to ostensible manifestations of power and Disciplinary Power which is a more insidious form of power, discursive in essence and operating by binding things together, filling spaces with interpretation and ultimate knowledge. When asked: Is resistance contrary to disciplinary power? Butchart replies:

Not only do such arguments speak to Sovereign power alone – which can and must be resisted – but also to the idea of »freedom«, which in its modern guise is itself a product of disciplinary power. For freedom today means the freedom of the individual, but since it is the individual who is the product of disciplinary power, the struggle to defend the »rights of Man« is itself as no more than another facet of discipline. Far from being a threat to the disciplinary regime, resistance is precisely that through which it ceaselessly expands and reproduces itself.²³

However arguable Butchart's dominance of discursive mechanisms of power in colonial situations may be, his conclusion that power »works also as a creative force that fabricates not only the human objects of social reality, but the social itself: Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth«²⁴ raises other issues in our contemporary world.

Butchart's orientation to explain not why but how, his focus on the perceived nature of the African body and the problematization of the African body itself as opposed to Postcolonial concerns with legal enactments, political struggles and professional power plays becomes clear. In this sense, Butchart's study of »socio-medical objects, concepts and practices within their own temporal specificity« is a History of the Present²⁵. Butchart therefore followed the analytical framework elaborated by Nietzsche and taken over by Foucault which is based on two basic principles – »généalogique dans sa finalité et archéologique dans sa méthode«²⁶ –, an approach which is archaeological in its study of discourses as so many different layers of historical events, and genealogical in its focus on descent and emergence of discourses. In Foucault's mind, the idea was to turn the problem around and, where history used to memorize the monuments of the past and transforms them into documents, history would now analyze documents to transform them into monuments.²⁷

According to Foucault in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, knowledge can take various forms: as a domain constituted by different objects which will acquire the status of a science or not; as a space in which the subject can position him- or herself to speak about peculiar objects (like the medical field); a space where concepts appear through the coordination or subordination of different discourses; finally knowledge is defined through the possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse.²⁸ In Foucault's view, knowledge is a particular way of knowing at a certain point in time and its different forms constitute what he calls »the conditions of possibility« or »epistémé«.

The implications of Butchart's study are then twofold: the »revolution« will only take place if there is an effective change in the structures of power but also at the condition that the logic of alienation and appropriation intrinsic to the normative dynamics of modern »rationalizations« is rethought. Therefore, further steps into the questioning of the validity of contemporary systems of representations are required.

Reconsidering the Sociological and Historical Field

Knowledge, however, derives not only from modes of interpretation in the present time but also from the understanding of a personal as well as a collective historical, social, political and cultural heritage.



29 Foucault, M.: »Governmentality«. In: Rabinow, Paul/Rose, Nikolas (Eds.): *The Essential Foucault*. New York, London: The New Pr. 1994, p. 244; French: Foucault, M.: *La gouvernementalité*. Dits et écrits. Tome 3. Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 635-657, here p. 656.

30 Barthes, Roland: *Writing Degree Zero*. Preface by Susan Sontag. Transl. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill & Wang 1968, p. 16 [French original: Barthes, R.: *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Seuil 1953, p. 27: »Il n'est pas donné à l'écrivain de choisir son écriture dans une sorte d'arsenal intemporel des formes littéraires. C'est sous la pression de l'Histoire et de la Tradition, que s'établissent les écritures possibles d'un écrivain donné«].

31 Abrams 1983, p. xiii.

32 Countless studies have demonstrated the necessity to make more complex the first narratives of the »industrial revolution«. Here are some of the conclusions of this re-evaluation process: it never was a homogenized process, for changes happened differently according to geographical, political and social contexts; it wasn't a »revolution« *per se* since transition from a mercantilist to a capitalist economy happened over centuries; it didn't happen along one straight line but it was the result of complex and often opposing processes. Finally, as Emile Durkheim stated in *Division du travail dans la société*, »the division of labor [did] not occur in a context of equality and opportunity [...] it [took] place against the background of an established system of inequalities in which some start out with great masses of wealth, property and other advantages at their disposal while others have nothing but the labor they can sell in an unfavorable market.« In: Abrams 1983, p. 29.

33 Tilly, Charles: *Big Structures, Large Processes and Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Found. 1984, p. 11f.: »1 – Society is a thing apart; the world as whole divides into distinct »societies« [...] / 2 – Social behavior results from individual mental events, which are conditioned by life and society [...] / 3 – »Social change« is a coherent general phenomenon. / 4 – The main processes of large-scale social change take distinct societies through a succession of standard stages, each more advanced than the previous stage. / 5 – Differentiation forms the dominant, inevitable logic of large-scale change; differentiation leads to advancement. / 6 – The state of social order depends on the balance between processes of differentiation and processes of integration or control. / 7 –

Analyzing moments in time, Foucault focuses on the production of power itself but eludes the processes and the structures from which this power originates – which in Butchart's analysis translates into a focus on capillary power as opposed to other coercive mechanisms). Conscious of the intrinsic rhetorical and fictional quality of historiographical narratives as demonstrated by Paul Veyne and Hayden White, Foucault resorts to a snapshot technique aimed to capture the specificities of certain types of occurrences at a particular moment in time, and in its specific context without having to delve into a causal and explanatory dialectics.

His awareness of the negative impact of the domination of studies on the structures of the state at a political, institutional, and economical level clearly appears at different levels: his reluctance to »totalize« power as an homogeneous phenomenon with comparable manifestations across the various strata of society; his reluctance to reify the state as the principal source of power; his refusal to understand power as a relation of domination in its traditional understanding between a superstructure and a base. In fact, Foucault claimed on several occasions that he never meant to develop a theory of Power but that his objectives were, instead, to unveil the processes through which the state was progressively »governmentalized«:

Maybe what is really important for our modernity – that is, for our present – is not so much the statization [*étatisation*] of society, as the »governmentalization« of the state.²⁹

Foucault's critical works ultimately aimed at producing a history of the different modes of subjectivation of the human being in Western cultures through the study of the relations of production and the relations of power in which the subject is placed.

What applies to the literary field according to Roland Barthes when he claims that »It is not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms. It is under the pressure of History and Tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established«³⁰, applies also to Social Sciences. I believe therefore that Foucault's insistence on the changing quality of discourse, echoed in Derrida's notion of »différance«, contributed to a shift in the field of sociology in methodological considerations from a perception of reified social analytical units – whether they are structures or »natural processes« to which the individual is subjected (Weber, Durkheim and Marx) – to social processes, heterogeneous in essence and relevance necessitating another type of »problematization« of human agency. According to Philip Abrams, historical sociology is then

a way of accounting for human experience which recognizes simultaneously and in equal measure that history and society are made by constant and more or less purposeful individual action and that individual action, however purposeful, is made by history and society.³¹

In the same way that Abrams claims that history and sociology should be reunited since they both try to understand human agency in relation to the process of social structuring, Butchart's statement can be understood as the necessity to systematically incorporate Foucault's notion of discourse and power to contemporary analysis in both sociology and history but in a more general sense in every area of knowledge dominated by western discourse.

To illustrate this point, let's take contemporary considerations in sociology as a basis for discussion. Since Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, sociology has focused almost entirely on the question of the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society to try to understand the individual's place and the role in the transformation of societies. Countless analyses have been directed towards understanding and defining the constitutive processes of industrialization – state making, bureaucratization, capitalization, urbanization, and proletarianization among others. Though the concept of »industrial revolution« has been largely rediscussed³², Charles Tilly reaffirms the presence (or the remains) in the sociological discourse of undesirable and counterproductive postulates³³. This attitude or should I say this conception of »time«, purely occidental in its linearity, is quite easily traceable in contemporary discourses at all levels of society and therefore has an undeniable effect on human agency. The glorification of the present is the founding principle of ethnocentric sociological theories based on evolutionism. They all comprise an analytical interpretation based on a historical development divided in stages, i.e. Comte's approach in three stages – theological, metaphysical and physical – or rather more recently modernization theories divide the world in four categories, the Fourth World, the Third World, Developing Countries, and Industrial Countries.



A wide variety of disapproved behavior [...] results from the strain produced by excessively rapid social change. / 8 – »Illegitimate« and »legitimate« forms of conflict, coercion, and expropriation stem from essentially different processes: processes of change and disorder on one side, and processes of integration and control on the other.«

34 Nisbet, Robert: *Social Change and History*. London, New York: Oxford UP 1969, p. 300.

35 Beard, Charles: Presidential Address delivered before the *American Historical Association* at Urbana, Illinois, December 28, 1933. Repr. by permission of the *American Historical Review* 39 (January 1934), pp. 219-231, here p. 224f.



36 Foucault 1984, p. 39; French: Foucault 1994, p. 40: »On essaie souvent de caractériser la modernité par la conscience de la continuité du temps: rupture de la tradition, sentiment de la nouveauté, vertige de ce qui passé. Et c'est bien ce que semble dire Baudelaire lorsqu'il définit la modernité par »le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent.«



37 In the chapter *Colonial Desires and the Postcolonial »Subject«*: Campbell, Jan: *Arguing with the Phallus: Feminist, Queer, and Postcolonial Theory – Psychoanalytic Contribution*. London, New York: Zed Books 2000, addresses the issue that both Marxist and Freudian approaches raise. Talking about the Marxist approach of class metaphor she argues, »what is meant by postcolonial is in fact a continuing neo-colonial situation where power operates in a hegemonic Marxist sense as a struggle between center and periphery.« (p. 198) The psychoanalytical approach presents the same perspective: »If the oedipal imaginary in Freud's and Lacan's texts construct a white male subject through splitting and castrating the mother's body from language and subjectivity [...] then a similar abjection of the »person of color« or the black into the bodily, animal and non-human other is also at work within the psychoanalytical text.« (p. 191).



In *Social Change and History*, Robert Nisbet insists on the fact that the main characteristic of developmental theories is its metaphorical portrayal of social change deeply embedded in western thought. The depiction of growth processes of abstract entities such as »Western civilization« and capitalism in natural and somewhat humanist terms of entities emerging, growing, transforming results in both the reification of an ahistorical mode of explanation and its normalization in the course of history.³⁴

It is possible that the overconfidence in sciences, which had proved for a few centuries its capacity to decipher and answer some of the mysteries of Nature, induced excesses in the liability of these paradigms to answer questions about the social and historical evolution of Mankind. What better testimony of this matter of fact than Charles Beard's presidential address before the *American Historical Association* when he claimed for a complete re-thinking of the methods used in the discipline of history:

The intellectual formulas borrowed from natural science, which have cramped and distorted the operations of history as thought, have taken two forms: physical and biological. The first of these rests upon what may be called, for convenience, the assumption of causation. Everything that happens in the world of human affairs is determined by antecedent occurrences, and events of history are the illustrations or data of laws to be discovered, laws such as are found in hydraulics [...] But on the other side, the achievements of the Darwinians were impressive [...] So under the biological analogy, history was conceived as a succession of cultural organisms rising, growing, competing, and declining.³⁵

Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate in this article the undeniable change from one cosmology to another and the necessity to reconsider sciences (social or natural) in their cultural embeddedness. It is undeniable that the explanatory paradigms used to provide a historical understanding of the past few centuries served the interests of a minority, which established and saw to the permanence of its ascendance over society at large. In this sense, it tends to show the interconnectedness between the capitalist ideology, on one side, and the scientific discourse, on the other side.

However, what Baudelaire's reflection illustrates, and Balzac before him for the matter, is a transformation in a gradual change in attitude towards the Present from the 16th century to the 19th century, which Foucault assimilates in *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?* as the advent of a specific mode of interaction between the human being and Time. It is a way of thinking and of feeling, of behaving and acting.

Modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment. And this is indeed what Baudelaire seems to be saying when he defines modernity as »the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent.«³⁶

The heroicization of the Present, then partly a result of the extraordinarily successful enterprise led by the wealthy classes in the West, partly the acknowledgment of the fast transformation of western societies, gave way to an imbalance in power both financial and discursive, which placed the West in the driver's seat or to use the postcolonial taxonomy at the center and the others at the periphery. Needless to say that this position of strength deeply affected the Social Sciences³⁷ ultimately leading at term to the universalization of Western principles. Every order is based on a definable ideology which stands at the core of a collective mode of Being. However, today's politics rely heavily on these very principles as a legitimization for aggressive military action, economic retaliation and generalized interference in public affairs.

Without a critical attitude towards knowledge and the basic understanding of its relativity to one moment in time and space, the risk is impending that the West shifts away from its avowed goals. The outcome is even more crucial because exchanges – both economic, cultural, social and political – have dramatically increased, transforming the world into a global village emphasizing the necessity therefore for increased dialogue, and the constitution of multipolar and plurivocal spaces for these exchanges. In a report focusing on the question of the necessary steps which the French society should take for a better transition to the multicultural context of the European community, Pierre Bourdieu's conclusions were as follows:



38 Bourdieu, Pierre: »Les conditions
sociales de la circulation des idées«.
Centre de sociologie européenne
EHESS-CNRS (UMR 8035). Actes de la
Recherches en Sciences Sociales 145
(2002), p.8.

The only universal foundation which can be given to a culture lies in the recognition of the arbitrariness which it owes to its historicity: the idea would therefore be to highlight this arbitrariness and to elaborate the theories necessary (those which philosophy, philology, ethnology, history or sociology provide) to understand and accept other forms of culture; hence the necessity to recall the historical rootedness of all cultural products, and this includes scientific constructions. Among the possible functions of historical culture [...] one of the most important, from this perspective, is its potential contribution to the learning of tolerance, through the discovery of difference but also the solidarity between civilizations. [Transl. J-JD]³⁸



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