

**Tomáš Hauer\***

## POSTMODERNISM AND GLOBALIZATION

1.

Whole generations of schoolchildren all over the world have said about something, that is now official: William Shakespeare is considered to be: boring, old-fashioned, untrustworthy, even ridiculous. At least this is the opinion of a teachers' board appointed by the most important province of South Africa, Gautenberg. The board suggested erasing some of the playwright's works from compulsory reading lists at all the state schools. They are known as frequently having an unhappy ending, they do not express cultural diversity in a sufficient way, they do not condemn racism and sex discrimination, all these principles being included in the South African Constitution.

The works in question included, amongst others, *Julius Caesar*, because it allegedly did not correspond to sexual equality. Other Shakespeare's plays – *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *The Taming of the Shrew* – did not do well either. Both of them were labeled undemocratic, sexist and racist. *Hamlet* was written off as undesirable because the play lacks optimism and is not terribly encouraging. *King Lear* was considered as too havenless. According to the board, the play is also full of violence and despair, its plot is unlikely and ridiculous. All the same some of Shakespeare's plays managed to be valued more favourably, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, although it does not have a happy ending, as well as *Macbeth* and the *Merchant of Venice*. However, Shakespeare was not the only one to catch a Tartar. *Gulliver's Travels* was also rejected – for containing a sort of humour, which is too alien to the South African mentality.

Let us take this seemingly funny story as a metaphor suggesting one of the significant problems of the present era. This problem can be expressed by the question: "What is the principle of the public area in a democratic society and how can it be measured?" What is the purpose of public area functioning? Is it creating a mass loyalty or restoring the idea of the society as a whole, which none of us as an individual really has, in our versions of the world?

There are a lot of keen supporters of the former option nowadays, including the chairman of the Italian Senate, a university professor and an influential philosopher, Marcello Pera. In his speech at the Lateran University in the Vatican he said: *Today an idea prevails in the West, that none of the intellectual constructions has a universal acceptance.* Pera warned against the influence of such philosophers as Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, or Gilles Deleuze. These thinkers preach an unacceptable thesis, that is reducing European civilization to *one* of many cultures. The history of the West is diminished, it resigns to the

---

\* Autor jest docentem Vysoka Skola Bańska v Ostrave (Republika Czech).

universal nature of Western thought, laws and institutions, the chairman of the Italian Senate states. Marcello Pera based his approach on just such a concept of the public area which assumes a possibility to give definitive reasons for your options by grounding them in some undisputable evidence or universal system of rules, which must be acknowledged in itself by every sensible person. Such a concept of the public area therefore looks for an absolutely just view where our version of the world is not conditioned by anything, so we can see the truth or we can see things as they really are.

A different approach to understanding the concept of the public area can be found in the works of philosophers who are usually called postmodern (Rorty, 1989, p. 73). The plot of the story offered to us by these authors in different varieties could be summarized as follows: Let us found an open society of the Western type on the assumption of the fallibility of all its participants. The fallibility in private, political or economic decision-making means that every purposeful and intentional behaviour has some consequences which have not been considered before (Deleuze, 1983, p. 149). Therefore the sensibility of our conduct is not guaranteed by the perfect character of our theories, which are – by their very nature – imperfect. However, it can be brought about by institutions such as the free market, independent public opinion or an effective public area – making us change, quickly recognize and rectify those unintended consequences of our decisions. Our sensibility is measured not only by finding a suitable solution, but also by our flexibility – that is how quickly we are able to react to the crisis of our initial ground caused by the fact that society as a whole never reacts according to theoretical assumptions.

I would like to use the following example to illustrate what the case would be like if we described them by means of a postmodern mode of speech. In his successful book *The War of Sperms* the American zoologist, Robin Baker, describes the ability of sperms to attack the sperms from the previous copulation which fertilizes the ovulum. Baker came to the conclusion that human sperms – like male generative cells of a number of other animal species – do more than just compete with each other. The sperms of one male also have a destructive effect on their “predecessors”. Individual species from a dragon fly to a chimpanzee have developed various methods to ensure that the last male’s sperms suppress other males’ sperms left in the female as a result of recent copulation.

Baker expressed the assumption that men produce special “kamikaze” sperms exploding in close proximity to another individual’s sperms, thus destroying them. This feature, like everything else in nature, must have some cause. Baker therefore deduces that men in their biological nature are used to changing partners. Mišel Siva-Jothy from the University of Sheffield does not agree with him, and claims that there are mechanisms in a woman’s organism, checking the quality of the received sperms. Namely the quantity of waste is high and a woman’s organs test the sperms carefully.

## 2.

In the public area of postmodern society we solve problems of two kinds. Firstly, there are problems that can be solved by a further growth of specialized knowledge. The dispute whether men produce “kamikaze” sperms or not can be unravelled, by increasing the disputants’

competence. R. Baker and M. Siva-Jothy can settle their argument by, among other means, more careful observation, more complete documentation of the problem, more thoughtful generalization of the facts, broadening the comparative sample, enforcing a miniature camera, using a revolutionary scientific method, etc. A similar situation concerns the questions – whether organized criminal activity is growing or not, whether inflation is increasing or decreasing, whether T-neutrinos exist, whether the influx of foreign investment is rising or falling, whether drug abuse among teenagers is increasing – and so on.

Secondly, in the public area we encounter problems that cannot be solved by a further growth of specialized knowledge. The inhabitants of Iceland, a small island in the north part of the Atlantic, have unwillingly become involved in a unique and controversial experiment. Iceland's government sold the genetic information and lines of descent of all the Icelanders to the commercial firm Decode Genetics, which will use this material to examine the genetic ground of inherited diseases and prepare new procedures to cure them. The firm offered the government in Reykjavik 200 million dollars over the course of the next 5 years for the total information about DNA, the inheritance carrier.

The island's population, whose language belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family, is regarded as one of the most homogeneous populations in the world. Since the 9th century when the Vikings' fleet from Norway landed on the island, its genetic ground changed as late as 100 years later – at that time several hundred Scotsmen and Irishmen settled on the island. Settlement records, church registers, regular census and even carefully kept lines of descent cannot be compared to anything else in the world. The Icelanders "collect" their long deceased ancestors, as others collect stamps.

The transaction between the government and Decode Genetics gives rise to a number of questions. Besides the ethical questions concerning the commercial use of a nation's genetic heritage, there are issues of the privacy and agreement of the individuals, their rights against the state, etc. According to Thomas Zoega, the chairman of the ethical board of the Iceland's Medical Association, the government took an illegal action by selling private personal data without the approval of the people concerned. Dr. Kari Stefansson, a charismatic founder and boss of Decode Genetics, affirms that he has bought a treasury of genetic information. He is absolutely confident that having access to this information will signify a revolution not only in Iceland, but all over the world.

The above stated questions, are similar to questions like – "whether we should reconcile to overwriting DNA with plant and animal species, whether the education system should be considered private or public property, whether globalization brings about economic growth and well-being or ecological degradation, what progress is or whether the existing abortion law should be made more stringent" – cannot be answered by further growth of specialized knowledge, referring to universal truths or a more complete enumeration of facts.

These questions can only be resolved by uncovering hidden moral, historical and value prerequisites of the *stories* in which these issues are assessed and evaluated. A French post-modernist J. F. Lyotard offers us the following methodologist approach. He shows that each perception not only includes imperfection, but that this separation, this selection is absolutely essential for our ability to perceive. To put something on the map means to make something else – the background, outside, against the surrounding – invisible in a way, to force out other

structures into a latent state or oblivion. Every problem, theory or event attracting our attention, offers us something or brings a wide choice of new opportunities, therefore it is a visible *shape* thanks to the power of separation. However, in the end *the background* overpowers the shape, transfigures it by incorporating it into the co-existence with the rest of the world and our preceding experience.

Let us use Lyotard's term for the second type of the questions appearing in public area and let us call them the background questions (J.F. Lyotard, 1983, p. 39). What we mean is the fact that e. g. the question of cloning men or interfering in human DNA for medical purposes, will certainly have a different background for those who live their lives in creationism and for those of us who believe in evolution.

In the background of these two stories there are two fascinating metaphors with their own poetics, the gracious God the Creator, versus a selfish gene, which contradict each other. The public area has its tension because those great metaphors collide all the time while solving various topics, their dispute making us better people and increasing the quality of our decision-making and making it more legitimate. The questions whose background is created by those great metaphors, cannot be solved by a more professional argumentation, the expert's impersonal jargon or accumulation of universal truths (Lyotard, 1984, p. 42–49).

The postmodern public area emphasizes the second type of the questions, making the dispute of those great metaphors more dramatic. Thanks to the conflicts they invoke, these metaphors open up the questions in the background for us, whose charming power we do not realize in the whirl of everyday life.

### 3.

Fewer and fewer global players are competing for all the places in the world, and they always win. They have their own rules agreed on in palaces and luxurious city-hotels converted into fortresses where the citizens are sifted, screened, threatened, and manipulated. Outside the walls of these fortresses an increasing periphery of the defeated demonstrates, whose voices are called “the violence of the psychopathic elements discontented about the state of the world” by the media. The contest for the media was won by the global players long ago (Amin, 1997, p. 3–10). Milan Knížák cannot stand mass demonstrations, because “they are not a dialogue, but making demands” and because “being a part of the crowd arouses the lowest instincts in a person”. However, he wrote about the financiers' convention held in Prague in 2000: “A financial company had dinner in the Kinsky Palace yesterday... They bought black tuxedos with bowties for our staff, gate-guards and various by-standers, so that their plainclothes security personnel should not offend the sophisticated aesthetic feelings of the bankers”. This remark is the most profound warrant of mass demonstrations held at the time of the convention. Globalization is not only represented by mobile phones, English, NATO, McDonald's, a flexible job market, the WTO or the Internet. Globalization is also reflected by liveries. Some of our fellow citizens are already polishing the buttons on the liveries that have been allotted to them and call it “integration into Euro-American structures”. And history has taught us that the footmen have always been the most devoted defenders of the order

represented by their livery. At the time of world-wide neo-normalization it is difficult to live without a livery, just as it was difficult in the past not to be a member of the Communist Party. There are no more places in the boiler rooms where the dissidents read Plato while stoking up. What are liveries? What are demonstrations? Let's say that a livery means to accept a place in the world defined by somebody else, to accept it without reserve. The others demonstrate. Each of us sometimes wears a livery, each of us sometimes demonstrates.

At present, two conceptions of globalization sharply compete within the public area. The *first* one defines globalization as liberalization of the world market, lowering costs, removing all historical, cultural, moral and political barriers limiting capital, growth, accelerating passages of information, etc. This conception of globalization is characterized by the hegemony of the economic experts' vocabulary strictly avoiding ethical questions connected with the untenable unbalance of power inside the globalizing institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank). We can call this definition of globalization an expert one. Mats Karlsson, a high officer of the World Bank, characterizes globalization as a process that has not been invented by anybody... and that will increase the living standard of all those who are able to adjust to it. The plot of the story, the economic experts offer us, could be summarized like this: the industrial society *absolutely naturally* develops towards a humanization of the system as a whole, towards overcoming alienation and valorizing specifically human qualities. Market economy rules are not the product of the people who expect to profit from them, but – as the former minister of privatization Tomáš Ježek writes in his book *Building-up Capitalism in Bohemia* – a system suited for man as he was created by God. It is exactly this blind faith in the conception of capitalism tailored by the Creator to man, that is so dangerous. *Such a* system can only be opposed and criticized by – dreamers, communists, criminals, post-modern relativists, extremists, or the enemies of the objective moral order, as capitalism is characterized by the activists of liberal institutions and journalists aimed at denouncing the communist past of the Czech society.

The *second* conception of globalization can be defined as – postmodern. For many people it is symbolized by a twenty-three-year old Italian opponent of globalization Carlo Giuliani, who was shot by two “carabinieri” at the summit in Genoa. Do not judge anybody according to his or her hair or shirt, because the heart of a person fighting for a better world can beat under it – these are the words uttered by the victim's father, who was the only speaker at a modest funeral. This second concept defines globalization as a process in which “the economy got out of the democratic control it was subjected to, at the time of the nation-state.” We are more and more often confronted with the problems that can be solved only if we are able to revise our elementary civilization data, and integrate them into the process of political decision-making. It is an experiment how to restore sense to the word “responsibility” at a time of ecological crisis, world-wide communication, and the irrevocable disintegration of national traditions.

The second conception of globalization shows that responsibility, moral as well as political, can only be restored within modernity, i.e. within the conviction that there are universal norms, objective knowledge and neutral judges we can refer to and thus get rid of our personal experience for the consequences of our behaviour for the historical worlds that have been built up for centuries. The disagreement between the economic and postmodern conception

of globalization confronts us with an urgent question. Is there any philosophical or political vision that can comprehend a check on our civilization data into political decision making? I am not sure. However, we can be sure about one thing. The long-term goal of the demonstration in Seattle, Prague, or Genoa, is not to bring a stop to globalization, but to reverse its apologetic definition. However, driving the postmodern concept of privatization out of the public area, led to a double-edged working of the arguments concerning globalization.

## 4.

Many of you probably remember Miloš Forman's film *The People versus Larry Flynt*, which was awarded a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1996. The main motto of the film is – freedom for unpleasant ideas. It is the life story of Larry Flynt, the founder of “Hustler” magazine. This magazine, as well as many others, are – according to the opinion of many Americans – full of sexual obscenities, but, on the other hand, for Flynt it is a means of fighting against censorship and prejudice exerted both by the government and the churches, trying to force their own morals on the people. Flynt, who was paralyzed after an attempt on his life in 1978, and moves about in a gilded wheelchair, says in one of the key scenes of the film: “If you protect my freedom to utter unpleasant ideas and opinions in public now, you will protect yourselves. Because I am the worst one now”. It is just the unpleasant opinions that need freedom, the conform ones surely do not need it. This could be the message – scandalous for many people – of Forman's film. An American director Michael Moore reminds his co-citizens in his bestseller *The Stupid White Men* (more than five million copies sold) of the fact that their “idiot nation” heads the statistics in the number of people killed with firearms, by greenhouse gasses emissions, by toxic waste production, by the daily consumption of calories, by rape and traffic accidents numbers, by the unsigned agreements concerning human rights and the United States, where half of all the scientists work on military projects, also possesses the highest number of all nuclear weapons of any country in the world.

The growth of fundamentalism, and the continual mobilization of armed forces, is the most disastrous of all the vestiges of the cold war; it is a way “war is established by permanently peaceful means” in Jan Patočka's words. The Growth's growth has no sense in itself, it only derives benefit from the sense of our historical world in a similar way as advertising. It needs war to flourish – either hot or cold, because the advantage of the war is the fact that the troublesome questions which make sense, can be postponed until after distant victories are attained. The religion of the growth contradicts everything we call culture and we have learnt to understand at school, it tolerates no limits, no delays. The people (*demos*), are not efficient and obedient enough as consumers for these fundamentalists, so they are going to be replaced by some biotechnologic-electronic hybrids.

Who composes the *demos* as a part of word democracy? The working class, according to the socialists, farmers, according to the clerics' warning murmur, scientists and managers, as the technocrats in made-to-measure clothes point out, the masses, as the revolutionaries shout clinching their fists, the incarnations of immortal principles, general will, a sense overcoming dark superstitions, as the enlightenment philosophers preach. *Demos* is the



community established when understanding historical contradictions of our own culture, its randomness, fragility, relativity and mortality become the strongest bond among people and nations (Rorty, 1999, n. 229–241). Each subculture, even the most fanatic one is nothing more than an (more or less desperate, more or less successful) attempt to solve unbearable contradictions of the culture in which the subculture was established. The contradictions of the global culture generate global subcultures of protest.

## 5.

On TV we can often see shots of crowded old boats on which Third World immigrants try to get on the Italian coast. They die in scores, bosses in the background with a mobile phone in their hands, ordering them to be thrown into the water when the police appear. The cemetery on Lampedusa island is full of bodies of the drowned and crosses numbered 001, 002, 003... Are we open enough to see the castaways from the old boats as a polemical picture of ourselves?

Modernity is a faith devoting two ways. The first one is apologetic: this way identifies Modernity with the industrial society and considers it to be a religion which should be professed by all mankind, economic growth should be started in all parts of the world and its enemies should be destroyed. Joe Lieberman, a Democratic candidate in the 2000 presidential election, stated that the American occupation of Iraq: “is a battle against Al Qaeda, Saddam and all the enemies of freedom and modernity who would like to change the 21st century into a global religious war”. This concept of modernity is nothing more than a global religious war against the old world, the world before revealing the truth about the economic growth (Latouche, 1996, p. 78–81). Modernity professed in an apologetic way is nothing more than one of the fundamentalisms which changed the 20th century into “a century of extremes”. Its most devoted followers are now the former enemies of modernity – conservatives calling themselves neocons (neoconservatives) are bulding the “Temple of Global Economic Growth on Earth”. The most favourite text of this sect, which many Europeans have converted to, is said to be Thukidid’s History of the Peloponesian Wars, as I have recently read in “The Weekly Standard”. “Whoever has such (great) power as we have”, the article states, “must find legitimate reasons for using it...”.

The process called – globalization – involves the public opinion of Western societies in non-solvable antinomies. It was Immanuel Kant who gave to the word *lent* the status of a philosophical concept. Questions such as – does the world have a beginning or is it ageless?, is it simple or complex?, is it lawful or accidental? – can never be answered in a definitive sense, because both thesis and antithesis are possible. It only depends on how we understand the question. Thus, according to Kant, a liberal state plays its own, irreplaceable part. It must all the time guard the citizens against the fanaticism of those who search for definitive solutions, who are not able to bear the disputableness of the situation of mankind. Therefore the promise of “the final solution” is the archetype and the most intellectual temptation of modernism.

Antinomies pointed out by the public area cannot be definitely solved, rather, they can only be stabilized, i. e. deprived of their potential destructiveness. An attempt at their final

solution would lead to unbearable cultural, political and social conflicts at the present paradigm. Therefore the conflicts of the late industrial society cannot be overcome, but faith in positive results of their promotion in the public area of democratic societies is still the goal and sense of the Western cultural tradition, and maybe the last legitimate source of the intellectuals' authority.

## POSTMODERNISM AND GLOBALIZATION

The treatise attempts at the philosophical analysis of the public area category. It points out the dissension between the traditional and postmodern definition of this conception, and the consequences resulting from these different attitudes. As far as the methodology is concerned, the study is based on J. F. Lyotard, presenting the postmodern approach as an essential contribution. In postmodern public area we can meet two basic types of dissensions, while only the first of them can be solved by further growth, of specialization and knowledge, while the second one needs, in each case, an *a priori* decision.

## LITERATURE

- R. Rorty: *Contingency Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press 1989.  
G. Deleuze: *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983.  
J. F. Lyotard, J. L. Thébaud: *Just Gaming*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1985.  
J. F. Lyotard: *Driftworks*, New York, Semiotext (e). 1984.  
Amin, S.: *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, Zed Books Ltd., London 1997.  
Amin, S.: *Spectres of Capitalism – A Critique of Current Intellectual Fashion*, Monthly Review Press 1998.  
Rorty, R.: *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books 1999.  
Latouche, S.: *The Westernization of the World: The Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive Towards Global Uniformity*, Polity Press 1996.