

# THE PLURAL LOGICS OF PROGRESS

Unlike him who said: “Man is something that must be gone beyond,” I shall have the temerity to say: “Man is something that must be opened out.” But this opening out presupposes a statutory plurality of the person, society and the world. It is because it ignored this plurality and broke away from it that the industrial era is experiencing what have been called contradictions.

## THREE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

The first contradiction was denounced by Marx and Engels more than a century ago: it opposes the growth of the forces and forms of production to the restrictive appropriation to which they are subject. The second and more recent contradiction—

Translated by Mary Burnet.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

which has never been so clearly expressed—is that of imperialism, in which the rise of centers of industrial power is opposed to the deforming or ravaging effects of their expansion on the rest of the planet. Like the first, it has not been entirely resolved. As for the contradiction which opposes the concentrations of technological activity to the survival of natural equilibria, it is insistently entering current news under the heading of pollution.

Our time has thus perfected both the experience and the denunciation of collective misfortune. While the analysis of this misfortune has not progressed at the same pace, and suffers from disturbing weaknesses in the third case especially, it has at least shown clearly that to the first distortion—the distortion between the growth of industry and distributive justice among the citizens—two others have been added. One of them results from the unequal sharing among nations of the profits and responsibilities of development. The other seems to turn economic creation against itself through the destruction of the natural environment—and it would make us despair of the future if it were not in the character of man to struggle against so-called fatalities by analyzing them more deeply and applying new values.

Thus we have three series of contradictions, all of them due to the lack of balance brought about in natural or social ensembles by the unilateral growth of a single factor. In all three cases, this factor is technology. In fact, the world dominated by technology had forged for itself, in the image of technology, a unilateral notion of progress. But now this notion is falling into disrepute, as a result of justified doubt, lassitude or bad faith. Is the “limitless expansion of the light of the sciences and the arts” going to justify the suspicion it inspired in that far-sighted genius, Rousseau? The fact is that in France in recent years we have seen Hegel’s ascending dialectic harshly confronted with other dialectics, or even abandoned for a rereading of *Zarathustra*. This does not mean that Nietzschean tragedy has succeeded Hegel’s progression—or what Marxism had made of it. It is succumbing to the same dizzying drift toward meaninglessness which, it would seem, threatens extremes of prosperity. Protest against material progress is now arising in many places in the country which used to be its most naively efficient protagonist. The liberal and monopolistic Prometheus no longer believes in his own fire. A number of its scientists and many of its young people—and

some of ours—are preaching the abandonment of the great technology, or even escape from the industrial world, without asking themselves any longer why it became what it has become, or whether, rather than condemning it as a whole, it would not be better to change it in ways which would give it back—or simply give it—a meaning.

Many of these denunciations have been manipulated to such an extent that they are becoming suspect. Mixing up the series—trying to elude the scandal of the inequality of treatment among the world's nations, societies and cultures simply by solving the class problems of industrial society, for example, or, worse still, trying to elude both these problems at once under the pretext that what counts today is avoiding the destruction of Nature and the untrammelled multiplication of life—these are sophisms whose power as sources of confusion and alibis must be combatted.

Only it is all too true that misfortune is cumulative. The deterioration of cities and suburbs, the poisoning of water and air only carry to their fulfillment the potentials already present in the first factory, with its mobilization of human labor, its hunger for raw materials, and its virtual conquest of colonial markets. But it is none the less true that social analysis may propose correctives once it has discovered, under these cumulative forms, the same underlying defect. Which is, in this writer's opinion, that we have lost touch with our bases, and are suffering from an ever more serious lack of relation between the various ways in which collective man opens out.

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MODEL

Grappling, like all my contemporaries, with these contradictions among others—which today have led not merely to a “crisis of progress” (to use the optimistic term of the '30's) but to its questioning by an apocalyptic or stealthy denunciation—I had the idea of reducing them to their simplest terms in order to understand their complexity better. For this purpose a diagrammatic model may be constructed of the life of any community at a stage at which a synthesis can still be verified on the spot. Since this operation, which aims at generality, is based on a monographic experience, and since the man who is attempting

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

it is a sociologist specializing in Islam, he may be forgiven for having chosen a village of the Upper Atlas which he knows well, that of the Ayt Mh'and, or "Sons of Mohammed."

Up there, under the icy foliage of walnut tress overhung by a towering stretch of cliffs, on the territory of a joint village, huddled in the middle of its pastures, it may still be possible, by putting together sociological notes, existential dialogue and historical information, to comprehend the interplay of the various elements that make up the whole.

Limited though it may be, this whole is nevertheless projected from a base. What base? The most obvious level of its relations with Nature, a Nature with which culture and history are already intertwined, through the mere fact that it supports the life of a group. The error of the colonial ethnographer, or of any sociologist dealing with primitive peoples, was, or still is, to consider Nature as actual, whereas it is only immanent to institutions and situations. However, it is from there that all the rest seems to have opened out.

Many people familiar with Arab countries have seen *doums*. The *doum* is a kind of palm tree, called *chamaerops humilis* by botanists and "dwarf palm" in the Maghreb. Its spathes, instead of having their spear-shaped leaflets arranged on either side of an axis, as is usual in palm trees, have them spread out from a center. We may keep this vegetable symbol of the opening out of human societies from a base. The metaphor, however, will not prevent us from having to ask again: "What base?" The most direct level of the relations between Culture and Nature, a depth of indistinction which necessarily precedes all differentiation, or, more vaguely, a "Starting with what?" Let us leave the term with its statutory ambiguity. It raises for the anthropologist, as it does for the philosopher and the psychologist, a problem which I shall not attempt to solve.

We can see enough of such a structure, however, to note that it is radiating and potentially limitless. As the radiation, or opening out, of collective life progresses—as the group advances in history and at the same time becomes more complex—the divergence of its modes of activity becomes more pronounced. This can be established by our survey. As we can reconstitute it at the stage which preceded its colonial vicissitudes, the little community was already pluridimensional. "Modes,"

“sectors,” or rather “dimensions”—the term matters little; it is their plurality that counts. It already took in technology, organizations, the sacred, the esthetic, the recreational and many other things as well. This heterogeneous assemblage brought together what rises from the local level (agrarian rites, pre-law, peculiarities of speech) and what comes from larger entities (a “Berber” or “Maghreb” culture) or even universal entities (Islam). But it was a regulated assemblage in which heterogeneity organized itself, in which diversity was echoed from one mode to another, and in which one accent or another already prevailed: in the present case, the accent of a community life closely welded to ecology yet keeping its distance from it, through war, adventure, expatriation, choral poetry.

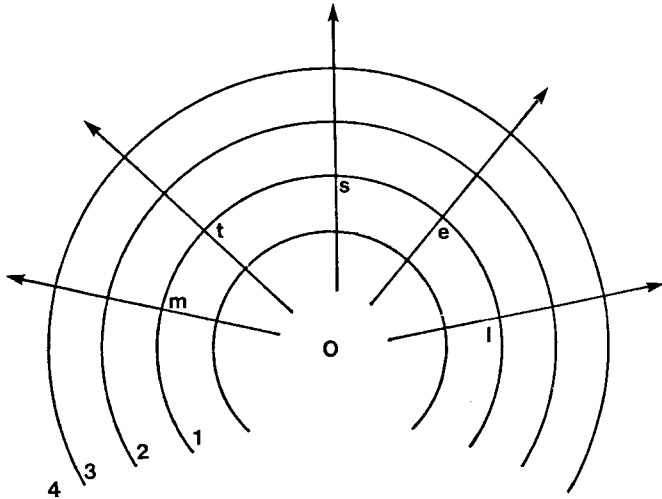
A reconstitution, I said. And even a reconstitution which was already outdated at the time it was inferred! For, observing this society, one can distinguish in its continuity phases which affect both the whole and each of its dimensions taken separately. The radiating design is arranged concentrically, so to speak. On its lowest level, which is largely hypothetical, are superimposed, in fact: 1) A colonial stage, where certain developments take place: then the accent is on adaption or retreat. The group (as a consequence of the setting up of “Arab bureaux,”<sup>1</sup> increased trade and transportation, the beginning of the emigration of laborers) is affected by contacts with the outside world, and even with foreign countries, which are much more compelling than before. It tries both to take advantage of these new factors and to protect itself from them. 2) A national stage, in which the same movement accelerates and gives priority, this time, to factors of education and modernization, patterned after a central mode and arousing some reactions and reservations. 3) But already world-wide propagations (ideological, economic and emotional) broaden the field, hamper, jeopardize, unsettle and refashion the institution, enrich the range of behaviors, open new perspectives.

If we consider that these historical stages correspond to levels of the person, and are reflected in shadings, in circumstantial variations, in samplings of behaviors, rather than in clearly

<sup>1</sup> The name given at the beginning of the conquest of Algeria, but then spread throughout Northwest Africa, to the organs of colonial administration placed over the tribes.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

distinguishable strata, we will have the idea of an elusive complexity—in which, however, now and again, diachronic and synchronic regularities may be discerned. It is these regularities that the model will try to indicate by exaggerating them.



Dimensions: n = morphological; t = technological; s = sacred; e = esthetic; 1 = recreational, etc. 0 = "the lowest level"; 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., = successive phases.

### FIRST APPLICATIONS

Such a construction, simplified though it may be, shows at once a characteristic of all exercise of life in society. To live in society is to open oneself out in several dimensions, these dimensions being within themselves in a relation of correspondence, of exchange, and, I believe, of reciprocal conversion. To the vertical liaisons which connect the base with the empirical surface that is observed and lived (the "dailyness," to use Henri Lefebvre's term) are added horizontal correlations among all the dimensions, without doubt even between each stage of each of them and all the others.

Already, perhaps, the figure is going to help us answer certain theoretical problems. First, the one which has given birth to so

many polemics—the problem of specificity. A necessary and accursed notion! Most people consider that the specificity of a society consists in the maintenance of the state where this society comes to itself from the past—and thus that, step by step, it goes back to so-called origins or principles. This explanation is either naive or perfidious! The present writer sees specificity, rather, in the relationship peculiar to one society or another between its base, its empirical surface and the interplay of its dimensions. And every society emphasizes this relationship differently. Most of them accent one liaison to the detriment of the others. Is this not the case with our industrial societies? Obviously, they stress technology and its derivatives, whereas we may imagine that Brahmin India made the sacred prevail, and ancient Greece an esthetic dimension, or a dimension of play, or of a reflexive distance with relation to the self.

But if specificity is relationship, then this relationship must be transposable. A relationship depends more on the system which forms its framework than on the contents which, if one may say so, fill it. To evolve, for a society—to evolve while remaining itself—is not to destroy this three-term relationship but to transpose it to another level, filling it with facts which proceed from another context.

It must be said that such a transfer—which is simple enough in the abstract, since it merely applies the logical distinction between a form and its contents—is never made without causing some damage. Logic is never as clear in life as it is on a diagram. This is all the truer because forms and contents—terms which are relative to one another—are valid only through their reciprocity, and may, in fact, be reversed. The feeling of identity hinges less on a system than on symbolic, factual or emotional signs which the transfer inevitably alters. Finally, the transfer cannot take place without acting on the interdimensional interplay itself. In the best hypotheses, the deformation will be merely temporary, and will give rise to new equilibria or regulations. Thus, all the movements of the modern world come from the acceleration of one privileged dimension, the technological. Theoretically they can and should find their regulation in a homologous acceleration of the other sectors. In fact, few nations or societies or cultures succeed in this, and when they do they pay the price.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

### THREE EXAMPLES OF INTERMODAL CONVERSION

Let us go back to a point that has barely been touched on. The various modes of a collective identity, as already noted, exchange with one another. Thus the technological can be exchanged with the morphological, the sacred, the esthetic, etc. Admittedly, it is hard to understand that a community may *be* successively and simultaneously this and that. But is it any more intelligible to say that this *produces* that? That the economy, for example, which is called a substructure, *produces* the belief or the art or the analysis, which are called superstructures or reflections? Of course, causal reduction has a legitimate place in any analysis. But the metamorphoses or variations of identity are a finding. Why should it be less scientific to take the finding seriously from the first?

It was during the 1950's that its wealth in hydrocarbons began to gush from the Sahara. This interior wealth left far behind it—at least where hopes were concerned—all the other kinds of wealth that had been developed in colonial times. Let us imagine a vineyard and an oil well. Pedology on the one hand, geology on the other; surface and depth: there is a vertical gap between the two. Is it by chance that it was then in the same decade, in the same country, that political demands became radical? They changed in phase, in degree, in quality. It was then, it seems, that the fight for emancipation was decided on. From a political debate imbued with parliamentary ideals, political demands passed to another type of action—eruptive, so to speak. In a quite different field, that of expression, it was also in that same period of time that the pace quickened. Kateb Yacine is as incommensurable with all that had preceded him in French-language literature in Algeria as is the wealth of hydrocarbons with the wealth of the grape, or the rise of guerilla activity with the controversy within the local bourgeoisie or manipulation at the polls.

Does this mean that there is a causal relation among these three orders of reality: literary expression, political demands, industrial development? It would probably be sophistic to look for one, and even more so to find one. But, inversely, is the connection between these three projections of Algeria no more than metaphorical? Or does it reveal something real: an end of blindness to the possible, the rise to the level of conscious



experience of realities which had hitherto been buried? A political predicate, an artistic or literary predicate, an industrial predicate: who can fail to see that the people, having found itself again, was investing itself in each of the three? This conjunction, which augured so much, was precisely the one on which the colonial system foundered: a rearguard fight in politics, the "Constantine plan" in economy, old-fashioned exoticism and provincialism in literature. This sign among others heralded the disintegration of a regime.

But let us look at another revolution, which may be easier to understand because it belongs entirely to the past: the Mahdist movement in the Upper Nile Valley, which started in the 1870's and lasted until it was crushed by Kitchener in 1898. We are fairly familiar today with the relations between millenarism and certain forms or phases of political resistance. A wounded collective identity—such as was the case with the Arab-speaking populations of the Upper Nile at the time—is mobilized by millenarist themes and finds a significant individual in whom bitterness and revenge is incarnated. It is true that another "explanation" may be put forward. The Jacâliyîn of the Upper Nile—especially since the second third of the century—had suffered from and benefited by contacts with Egypt. Effects of cultururation and acculturation had come into play which had made these riverside people an enterprising class, particularly well equipped for the economic penetration of Africa. The riches of Africa were rubber, gold dust, ivory, and finally and above all, it must be admitted, slaves. Hence the accusation often made against Mahdism by its opponents: that it was only a revolt of the big Arab or Arabized merchants against European penetration and its abolitionist hypocrisy. The story of the great merchant Zubayr, explorer and conqueror of the Bahr al-Ghazal and the Darfour, illustrates this competitive dynamism.

But should we oppose the socio-economic explanation to the ideological explanation, or consider that they are true only alternately and both together? In the end, is it not more economical to admit that the same North Sudanese society took on both of these aspects turn by turn and simultaneously? And finally that, since all of this happened to coincide in a magnetic personality, it conferred on a moment in Nilotic history an intensity which, transforming itself in turn into a capacity for

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

political organization and military efficiency, held off all the imperialisms of the time, without exception—in the north, the south and the west—for some fifteen years?

But let us come back to Europe, and even to the chosen country of what is called scientific socialism. At the time of the first Five-year Plan, the *Piatiletka*, which then looked like a revolutionary dream, a whole body of romantic and lyrical literature sang the enthusiasm of the masses who supported it. Are we to see in this nothing more than well-orchestrated propaganda? To do so would be to minimize the importance of this synchronism. Economic innovation, the dynamics of a great people, political affirmation stretched to that high degree of symbolism—were all these things unrelated to each other, or reciprocally “determined,” or did they exchange themselves with one another in the common intensity which characterizes great historical moments?

The third hypothesis consists simply of taking seriously a collective identity and the simultaneity of its most diverse manifestations—in other words, precisely what is felt from the inside and observed from the outside.

### INTERMODAL CONVERSION AND COLLECTIVE SYMBOLS

But our minds, conditioned by mechanical efficiency, have got into the habit of trying to find a causal connection under every correlation. To this search, however, are opposed difficulties of a philosophical nature, already noted by Em. Meyerson—I shall leave them aside—and the evidence of our own day, to which I shall ascribe more importance. For it would be very hard to explain in deterministic terms the recent collapse of colonial empires in the face of the surge of African or Asian nationalisms mobilized by collective symbols: the mother country, the revolution, freedom. Are we to say that these symbols “reflected” deep socio-economic changes? To do so would be to pay very dear, through the metaphor of reflection, for our fidelity to positivism.

For me, the specific character of a society lies in the relationship between its base, its experience and the interplay of its various dimensions. This relationship comes more obviously from collective semantics or semiotics than from a causal connection. First,

because in a community everything must be expressed in language: phonic language and languages which are other than phonic. Is it possible to conceive a form of community life whose patterns, behavior and institutions would not have, for collective action, the force of expansion, communication and rupture attached to all symbolic language? But by this last term I do not mean the abstract and manipulable equivalent that is seen in it by mathematicians and—following their lead—physicists, biologists and so on. Nor do I mean the term as it is used in current practice: social speech which is adequate to express what it represents or projects. There is a lot more in a collective symbol than a simulation or a recall; there is a mobilization and an image.

In this case, the image comes from afar. Most often, I believe, it “comes up” from the base—in other words, from depths that are thus projected into experience, to feed experience and feed on it. Mobilization? How? Through a morphological maladjustment. This collective symbol, which opposes itself to any discursive equivalent that implies the adequation of what is meant to what means, is the very thing that accounts for the disproportion between the latter and the former, in the sense that the effect it exercises is incommensurable with its vehicle. Here, dissymmetry is what counts. The symbol concentrates forces in the social field in order to redeploy them. In the last analysis, it is the opposite of the mathematical symbol, which is an abstract reduction. It is a contraction into an image. It owes its force as much to what it leaves out as to what it takes in. It is an interplay of fullness and emptiness, a dynamism which gathers itself together before it leaps. A symbol—that of the nation, for example, or of the revolution—permits a group to bypass intermediaries, sometimes to do without means—in any case, to find substitutes for the advantages provided by social discourse and pragmatic connections; to pull other triggers, so to speak. At the time of the Algerian war, Frantz Fanon thought he could contradict Engels on this question.

Perhaps it may be clearer now that, acting through collective symbols that telescope a base, an interdimensional interplay, vertical articulations and a surface of experience, the life of a society may make itself successively and simultaneously technology, organization, sacrality, etc., rather than having one or another of its dimensions “determined” by one of the rest.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

Whence it results that any distortion between the respective development of the various modes of collective opening out disturbs their correspondences, weakens their exchanges and brings about a loss of significance and finally of energy.

### CRITICISM OF THE FIRST MODEL

It will be seen that the model's possibilities of application, and even its theoretical suggestions, are not limited to the purely figurative. Nevertheless, it is open to serious objections. First, it is a rough diagram. What it gains in simplicity it loses in shadings. This was inevitable. But, this being the case, do not some of its simplifications verge on the ridiculous?

Horizontally, when it fans out in various dimensions—the technological, the morphological, the sacral, the recreational and esthetic, etc.—its list merely reproduces the division made in sociology textbooks. But these headings have only limited operational value for those who consider, as the present writer does, that the respective consistencies of the dimensions, modes or sectors hold to their positions in a mutual and reciprocal interplay of influences.

Furthermore, such enumerations are liable to run into the dogmatism that tries to reduce "human nature" to a range of categories. It is better to consider that the dimensional plurality of social man is limitless and variable. If we had to define it, we should have to embark on some very subtle taxinomic reasoning. And even so, this reasoning would provide us with different inventories according to the groups and the stages considered. This task, I believe, has not been undertaken. But it does not matter. What counts, it must be repeated, is the opening out from a base that is always present.

### A PARENTHESIS IN THE FORM OF A DIALOGUE

"Always present? You are becoming obsessed with the simple landscape of your Ayt Mh'and. Under the pretext of concrete observation, findings, etc., you are confining yourself to empiricism. But 'There is no science that does not deal with what is hidden.'"

“Perhaps. But are you not confusing ‘scientificity,’ as you put it, with reduction? This collective experience, which you admit the sociologist should take into consideration, is above all ir-reduction, and even de-reduction, since it recapitulates and mobilizes all that is behind it and under it.”

“So you are falling into pure phenomenology?”

“No, for that interdimensional interplay which I consider so important, as you know, is not phenomenon but structure. And it would remain impossible—and unintelligible, besides—without reference to the base...”

“Always that naturalistic bias!”

“Yes, rather than a metaphysical, mathematical, molecular or other bias. But it is not my right. Yet I grant you...”

“You grant what?”

“That this Nature is never a primeval Nature. Technology in particular—leaving aside all the rest—keeps making it more and more complex and carrying it further and further. We never deal with Nature, but with something factitious that may or may not be naturalistic. But let us confess, it will never be ‘natural’ again.

#### CRITICISM OF THE FIRST MODEL (CONTINUED)

So we come to a new objection. To proclaim an interdimensionality that includes several terms is to ignore the primacy of the technological, to which the West has itself subscribed and to which it has made the others subscribe. Man made technology in his own image. Technology has returned the compliment. Today we are more than half products, technological beings. And we can save ourselves from blind submission—a submission which is also, as we have seen, contrary to technology—by activating an interdimensional interplay within ourselves. But is this a desire or an observation? The technique of industry has given variety to the ecology of human societies, and has developed, and at the same time codified, the advantages they draw from it—which obviously could not fail to modify their “base.” Its apparently limitless progression gives all the rest of the collective being a thrust which obliges this rest to speed up too, or to throw itself forward in order to escape falling into a decline. What is

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

more, it invents, creates the need for, or perfects the language of science. So it conditions even the analysis of its own limitations.

What I shall contest is not its power, nor even the rising perspectives which it opens to optimism, but the extreme applications that are made of it. Besides, what counts here, it must be repeated, is not a debate concerning essence, which would fall into the realm of philosophical controversy. What counts here is the observation of differences in degree of development—still more convincing by their failings and the catastrophes that result from them than by their effective exercise. What counts is the finding of a series of layers between a base and a collective experience. Only what I first saw as historical succession—following a too-simple example—might very well stem not from duration but from other types of progression; indeed, it would not be too hazardous to say: from other types of articulation.

### THE IMPROPRIETY OF THE TRANSPOSITION OF TEMPORAL SERIES

The first model distinguished strata, or phases: a chronological synchronism roughly conditioned by the succession of the pre-colonial, the colonial and the postcolonial in the same village. Now, although this succession can be globally traced in the duration of the Ayt Mh'and, and although it even affects the progression of certain modes—the technological in particular, which for the past 150 years has undergone a relatively homogeneous acceleration—how can we retrace the same progression in more subtle realms, like organization, belief or art?

### AN EXAMPLE DRAWN FROM THE CHORAL POETRY OF THE CHLEUHS

Let us consider the choral and choreographic art of the Ayt Mh'and. When this writer began to observe it, it had lost its group significance. Under the Protectorate it was no longer any-

thing more than an esthetic exercise, a relief from the repression caused by old and new constraints, a compensation for a circumscribed life, a tolerated occasion for making epigrams about the regime, a nostalgic escape, a recourse to the dialogue of the sexes insofar as this dialogue might provide consolation for unwelcome circumstances. Furthermore, this art looked more and more like an obligatory festivity. The quadrille of its dancers carrying powder horns (*taskiwin*) on their shoulders—already specialists!—had become the accompaniment of all official visits. So the dancers had become professionalized, and already compromised. There were times, of course, when the people danced among themselves, or when the choir, under the eyes of an officer or “native chief,” became ironic at his expense or at its own. But what art is not double? The group saw itself and listened to itself again in the prancing troupe, which was enthusiastically joined by the uniformed soldier on leave, the former miner, and the postal clerk back from the coast.

Since independence—with the further increase in centralization brought about by the state and the party, and the rise in the emigration rate—the art of the Chleuhs seems less like the expression of a real or supposed autonomy than like that of a peripheral originality. A policy of encouraging tourism has led to an interest in what is more and more folklore and less and less a community exercise; this interest has had both positive and negative effects. Phonograph records are made, troupes appear in the city, and the radio beams back to the mountaineers their contribution to the entertainment of the people on the plain. Which probably leads to phenomena of national participation, but also to reservations or even indirect resistance.

Is there—as a naturalistic esthetic might expect—a corresponding drop in quality and sincerity? No one, so far as I know, can answer questions like this or like the following: Are new forms of lyricism or music going to compensate for this gradual change in role? Are some people trying to transpose the old community spirit into North African modernity? One thing may be noted, however: the city intelligentsia are not insensitive to this destiny. Eager to rediscover their own basic culture in the midst of cosmopolitanism, they have taken over the castagnettes

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

of the Gnâwa,<sup>2</sup> the *derboukka*<sup>3</sup> of the tambourine players, and other forms which they would like to integrate into a new form of dramatic art. In the choreography of the Chleuhs, they appreciate the possibilities for gesture and happening. Is an inspiration which is now individualistic but turned toward the masses, international in its procedures but fervent in its specificity, going to revive—insofar as they are dead—both the timeless and the historical values of this choreography, to open them out in a new cycle?

Or is the now accelerating deterioration of these forms going to produce compensatory initiatives? From a Chleuh village in the Anti-Atlas has come a French-speaking poet whose language explodes. From another a painter or a dramatist. But derivations and substitutions can go much further: even to economic or ideological innovation. Look at the new industrialists of Casablanca. Under what new classifications is the commutation inherent in the exercise of the group taking place—not only among types of expression, but among modes of being and activity? But since the group is no longer the whole of society, as it used to give the impression—and in some respects the illusion—of being, will it not extend its scope of exchanges and the range of its experience to the detriment of its original source?

This question goes beyond the writer's present purpose, which is to find out whether temporal succession affected the development of a form of collective expression. The answer: it seems to have affected this development, but roughly. Is this due to two radical changes in the political framework within fifty years? But even in this case we cannot speak of progression or even—despite certain appearances—of regression. The chronological parameters lack pertinence. The clues that might reveal a characteristic rhythm would have to be drawn from within the art-form itself, from its own laws, its own relations with group sensitivity, its faculties of renewal and substitution. How great the problem would be if, instead of choral lyricism, we had studied the evolution of religious rites, ethics or belief!

<sup>2</sup> Literally "Guineans," guilds in Northwest Africa of itinerant dancers in a more or less burlesque African style.

<sup>3</sup> Percussion musical instrument consisting of a skin stretched across an earthenware pot.



The correction that has to be made in the first model results from the most banal experience: A society never shows the same rate of advance, and still less the same dynamism, in all its sectors. It is true that duration affects all of them. But according to what logic? A logic that corresponds even distantly to temporal succession, so that social organization, artistic creation and even belief and observance "advance," objectively, from century to century? The preceding example would lead one to doubt it.

Yet this was the conviction of the optimist of progress, persuaded that the advance of science and enlightenment would lead man by a tortuous but sure road from barbarianism to civilization, and finally to happiness. Comte's positivism, and the various forms of socialism, including Marxism, share more or less the same outlook. Jacques Monod, who recently put it into question under the name of the "new alliance," has recourse to an ethic of knowledge that is hardly dissociable from cumulative progress. And the neo-positivism he claims to stand for, although it is opposed both to the Marxists and to Teilhard de Chardin, still finds a place for a "teleonomy" which, in the last analysis, is linked with a univocal arbitrage of time.

In all these cases, dogmatism, overemphasis and error seem to stem less from the idea of ascending time—to which the very sentiment of democracy is, after all, attached—than from the fact that too much importance is ascribed to a single series. Where we are concerned, at least, this series is not the sacred, nor the recreational, etc. It is obviously technology, which in principle or in fact, openly or not, has been promoted to the dignity of a base, or a structure, or a criterion. It is true that from the discoveries of the last third of the 18th century down to our own time of scientific and technical revolution, the dynamism of this series has never ceased to affect all the others, nor to affect the very means of analyzing particular or common vicissitudes. However, it would be drawing an exaggerated conclusion from the primacy of this series to project on other series the articulations which are peculiar to it.

For in the various sectors of collective becoming, there is by no means common progression, synchronised articulation, homogeneous temporality. Nothing proves the logical succession,

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

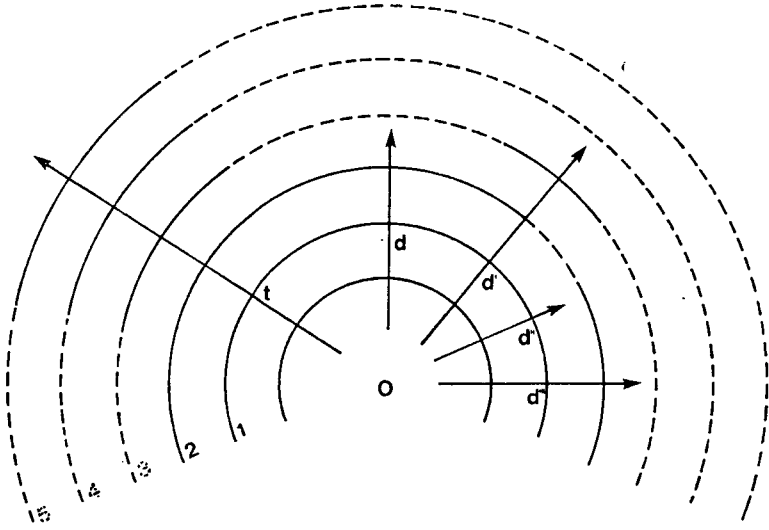
and still less the superiority, of our architecture or town-planning over what is known of the architecture and planning of Medieval and Oriental cities. To go back to the example of the village in the Atlas, it is not at all obvious that its taking over by the emissaries of the "great Caid" or by the colonial or even national civil servants is more "advanced" than the hope of Proudhonian freedom that reigned there before. Who knows even whether tomorrow's history will not draw its guidelines from the precolonial stage, by rekindling some virtuality or other that has long been hidden? We might as well admit that carrying over the temporal articulation into other modes is only, under the guise of historicity, of a predominant factor and which social analysis is having so much trouble getting rid of these days.

So, if the criticism of the first model led to the idea of a taxinomy that is renewable according to the period and according to the cases considered, insofar as it rearranges the various dimensions of group life in their relations with one another, then, if we are to explain their articulations and thus, if the occasion arises, their progress, we must also conceive a logic proper to each of these dimensions taken separately.

Such a search has hardly been begun. This fact may be explained by the enormous theoretical difficulties it raises. True, in the comparative history of civilization we can catalogue several legal, religious, artistic and other periods whose span can be defined, and perhaps we can also catalogue the statistical laws of their succession. This succession may show—although over a long period of time, roughly, and perhaps revocably, if I may say so—a progression. Saint-Simon, Comte, Marx proceeded in this way to trace, from evidence that aimed to be objective, a law of human development. Their attempts, however, failed to take into account the undeniable plurality of the lines of development, which on the other hand was affirmed by Fourier, with playful exaggerations. Even more than erudite information, all these sociologists were applying scales of value. Perhaps they could not do otherwise. Our time, which is asking question about value itself, prefers to carve out in another direction. Some lines of research lead us to perceive an internal logic of the forms and types of social, esthetic or other manifestations. We are still a long way from being able to project and articulate what the development proper to each social mode should be in order

to correspond to “progress.” But the demand for progress is a new idea on our planet. And from so many failures and contradictions one idea comes out at least negatively: that of the mutual homology and respective specificity that characterize sectors, modes or dimensions in relation to one another.

Hence the necessity of constructing another model that will show the discordances of the present time, which are infinitely more complex and more serious—as we might have expected!—than those of a village in the Upper Atlas.



t = technological dimension; d, d', d'', etc., = other dimensions.  
 O = “the lowest level”; 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., = real or postulated phases.

It is true that this second model is also oversimplified. Although the rhythm that affects each of its modes taken separately is specific, it combines, in fact, with all the others. 1) From a dimension that is especially emphasized at this stage of the system, it either undergoes what economists would call induction effects, or, on the contrary, 2) compensates by a symbolic overload for its lag with relation to the acceleration of some other mode. 3) It corresponds indirectly to a global periodization, which itself is influenced by the particular emphasis

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

of the system. And, of course, it is also affected by 4) the transformation of the base and 5) the styles of collective experience. It is therefore specific but not autonomous.

### OUTLINE OF A FIELD OF DIFFERENTIAL RESEARCH: ON ISLAM...

Up to a recent time, Arab societies were distinguished, and distinguished themselves, from other societies by Islam—that is to say, by a set of cultural traits. The night before the battle of Tell el-Kebir, which delivered Egypt to the English in 1882, Colonel Orabi, disavowed by the Sultan himself, had recourse to reciting litanies of religious brotherhoods. Three years later, it was again in the name of the faith that the Sudanese Mahdi captured the fortress of Khartoum. Already, a strange character, Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghâni, had begun to spread in the Orient an enlightened Islam which participated in the momentum of the world around it.

Of these three tendencies—popular mysticism, millenarism and the rationalizing approach—the last, apparently, was going to win out. It is now imposing itself both on the institution of religion as such and on the behavior of the larger and larger fractions of these societies that are being affected by the industrial era. From the Egyptian Abdouh to the Algerian Ben Badis and the Moroccan Allal al-Fâsi, it rose victoriously against ritualism and traditionalism, those belated but reliable allies of colonization. Thus the Islamic profession of faith, which used to be the banner of resistance and demarcation where the colonizer was concerned and is today the sign of a cultural identity in relation to the rest of the world, risked acquiring contents that were more historical than intrinsically religious. It is true that the very principle of such a distinction is refused by a movement which has known periods of brutal political energy: that of the Moslem Brothers. But to question this distinction is to go against an invincible tendency to modernity, to make belief and observance pass more and more from the macro- to the micro-sociological. Would this not be the characteristic of a kind of progress that is specific to the series? In any case, the tendency may be observed in most of the Arab countries. It finds its limits—temporarily—

less in minority or sectarian oppositions, or in a traditionalism that has been beaten on all fronts, than in its altercations with the West.

For Western aggression has indeed valorized Islam as a sociological obstacle to its own annexation. Some of the effects of this valorization have been salutary, but others have been and are regressive. Among the latter I would range, in Egypt, the setting up of lay faculties (of medicine, agriculture, etc.) in the theological University of Al-Azhar, in the 1960's, which put the very notion of lay teaching in jeopardy, although this notion had been accepted for nearly half a century; in Algeria, delays opposed to the emancipation of women; in Libya, anachronistic forms of puritanism; in various places, all-too-convenient lines of argument used against customs or ideas represented as having come from the Infidel. The fact is that under the stamp of Islam certain sectors of behavior have undergone a valorization in exact proportion to their preservation. This compensatory symbolism had a justification at the time when Islam, threatened in its innermost being, had to stand, so to speak, with its back to the wall of its own particularity. But now, far from serving that being, the same symbolism turns it away from the search for homologies with the rhythms of the world, or even with the acceleration of other sectors of its own activity: economic initiative, for example, trade-unionism, politics, several fields of esthetic expression, a general attitude of open-mindedness.

To limit oneself to the canonic reformism of Abdouh and Rachîd Did'a,<sup>4</sup> which looked radical two or three quarters of a century ago, is to fall back into conservatism. Correlatively, the weakness of doctrinal production will contrast with the extent of the means employed. The mediocrity of the attacks that Islam is facing from anticlerical, excitable or even unbelieving citizens, and the energetic protests to which these attacks give rise among the masses, cannot conceal a lack of creativity in the really spiritual fields: exegesis, for example, or even knowledge of the sacred text, the criticism of traditions which was so flourishing during the great periods, metaphysical controversy, the study of the basic problems that any faith must formulate for itself in modern

<sup>4</sup> The journal of Rachîd Rid'a, called *Manâr*, held an important intellectual position in the Egypt of the interwar years.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

times, etc. The fact is that Islam, which was counter-acculturating itself, if one may say so, by valorizing this or that pattern of traditional society, was acculturating itself to a so-called Western reason where all the rest was concerned: hence its efforts at apologetic, concordism and even laicity.

However, all this applies only to institutional Islam—that of theological teaching, of propaganda and of officials. Fortunately for sociological reality, Islam has its roots in the admirable fidelity of the masses. Because of this, it remains the surest guarantee of a collective authenticity, which is, according to him, the privileged witness of a revelation. Let us hope that these roots will permit it to project itself in its own style, towards a modernity that will be really its own. Various indications seem to show that it has begun to do this. It would thus correct the disequilibria and mend the ruptures caused, in the societies which profess it, by an economic development that has been undergone—or, in the best hypothesis assumed—from outside.

### ... ON UNDERDEVELOPMENT. FIRST TYPE ...

Most of the industrialized countries which are considered developed are really underdeveloped to the extent that the various dimensions of the social experience are out of tune with one another. These countries are powerful and redoubtable, certainly, and they owe it to the continuous thrust of their technology. The creative aspects of this technology must not be underestimated. But it has remained as solitary as a factory chimney. It has not been accompanied, at least at the same rhythm, by homologous accelerations in the fields of organization, sex, art. The three contradictions, among others, that were noted at the beginning of this study have darkened the contemporary history of the industrial West, and continue to do so. Other contradictions are coming into view which youth is denouncing in a heartening way.

The increasing complexity of the problems raised by an industrial civilization (which, incidentally, is not yet worthy of the name), the intensity of the demands it raises, the finesse of the languages it invents to meet them or at least describe them—all this, it is true, may be considered objective progress.

It is not by chance that Marxism, for a long time, drew from these fruits of negativity most of its powers of appeal. But the real or fallacious prosperity engendered by technique proposes to submerge even this. How many values based on scarcity, faithful companions of man since prehistoric days, disappear of themselves, in certain cases of material saturation, without our being sure that their dynamic is taken over by other values—of desire, fantasy, or superfluity...

There is something worse. These societies, which developed social analysis, fix it, or rather live it, in mediacy. They may consider themselves radical. They are no longer fundamental. They dis-adhere, if one may say so, from their bases. These latter, lost from sight, re-emerge only in nostalgic petitions formulated by intellectuals or esthetes, more naturalistic than nature, and for that very reason inoperative or suspect. The very return to the fundamentals which revolutionary parties profess in their demands loses much of its power because it obeys a mechanistic logic that makes them tributaries of the bourgeoisie. Much could be said about the innovating values of determinism! And about a class concept which would be situated only on the level of altercation—that is to say, of classification. To adopt such a concept would be to play industrial society's game. Does it not carry to incredible lengths a monism of division and compartmentation? The established order may be contradicted by a demanding order, but who knows whether both do not agree on the primacy of the classificatory? A primacy so strong that it draws added strength from the growing possibilities of being transgressed that it is itself fostering!

#### . . . SECOND TYPE

From this rich, triumphant and swollen type of underdevelopment, let us turn to the poor, compressed and constrained type.

The citizens of non-industrial societies no longer look upon their underdevelopment as a hardship which fate has inflicted on them. They ascribe it above all, and not without reason, to their lack of technical advancement. Which their governments are hastening to remedy, since it is easier and less dangerous to do this than to try to make up a political, social and cultural lag.

## *The Plural Logics of Progress*

But how can erratic performances be a substitute for the activation of the whole? There is no country in the world today that cannot acquire the very latest type of factory, "ready for use," and raise from the plains of its stagnation, insultingly called the traditional sector, a few bastions of advanced industry. Has this made the whole progress? All that has been done is to create one more surface irregularity—one distortion more.

Of course this society, if only through continuity with the world around it, has the obligation as well as the legitimate ambition to achieve industrial development. An obligation that must be carried out under pain of death. But it nevertheless feels intensely the threat of a loss of its identity. A fear which is all too well founded, since industrial acceleration—that of other societies more than its own, which is one more source of deformation—not only incites it and carries it along, but perturbs its social fields and conditions its language and its tools of reflection.

So what is to be done? To overvalue technology, in order to reach a modernity that is too much an imitation of others' modernity, is in many respects to renounce one's self. Sensitive, and with reason, to the increasing discordances between what is called its modern sector and all the rest, the society will compensate by stressing all the rest. But, far from applying to these other dimensions of its social being the acceleration which alone would re-establish their own specific internal relationships, it will have a tendency to sublimate them—to maintain them, in fact, as they are, or rather as they were, for the retroactive utopia comes in at just the right point. To overvalue the "cultural" in this way, instead of accelerating it in order to balance the technological borrowings, is to fight against what is imitated by having recourse to what is unhealthy. Real modernity, it must be recalled, postulates a harmonic projection (to go back to Fourier's term) of all the modes of social experience. It is difficult to achieve, since all these modes, in their relations with one another, are homologous as a whole and respectively specific, and since we do not yet know with certainty the laws of progression which are proper to each of them.

Nevertheless, the evidence is there, generally felt by the masses and confirmed by numerous failures and all-too-rare successes. Progress will be total or there will be no progress. Which means:



progress will be plural or there will be no progress. The result is, in practice, that the exhilaration of freedom, experienced on the level of the formal nation and studiously channeled into the field of economy, ought to exercise itself today in all the other sectors: that of the activation of the nation, the region, the community, the trade union and the family, of the arts, of philosophy etc. Is this the case? Such correspondences, or conversions, are still lacking practically everywhere. In the end it might turn out, *mutatis mutandis*, that in some of these countries discordances would arise analogous to those that began to show themselves around 1950, in a country like Algeria, between the gush of oil from the Sahara and the stagnation of the regime. What am I saying? They are already bursting forth.

#### BACK TO THE INITIAL THEME

However, these pessimistic findings express only one side of the truth. To say that most of the societies in the world, rich or poor, are underdeveloped in one way or another is to say that they all ought to develop, and that they can. Let us go further. Their capacity to progress depends on the manner in which they situate themselves, at each stage, in relation to their base, and in which they activate the reciprocal relationships among the axes along which they open out.

In the end, everything depends on the way in which the exchange of collective facts and symbols is organized inside them. It has always been thus. But the bitter privilege of our time is that this exchange and its deficiencies no longer escape the consciousness of the group nor the analysis which would study them. This analysis, which the advancement of the social sciences henceforth makes possible, can be efficient only if there is freedom of information and discussion—both within the community and between it and the other communities in the world. And this freedom would only translate, by accomplishing it in history, a plurality which is inherent to the world, the person and society.