

ELEMENTS FOR A THEORY
OF MODERNITY

“It is by transitions—almost by evasion—that the myth of Progress was transformed into the myth of the Modern. To such an extent that the latter is still sometimes expressed in the language of the former and that people are confused. But the tone has changed, the words have changed meaning.”

Charles Baudouin, *Le Mythe du Moderne*,
Geneva, 1946

The terms “modern” and “modernity”, like many other terms in common use and of wide extension, are extremely complex. And a theory of modernity should have no other goal initially than to settle this polysemy in the hope of arriving at a sufficiently rigid definition that the “thing” itself can become the object of a clearer consideration. But what is the path toward this greater clarity?

It would seem that a work as meritorious as Henri Lefebvre’s

Translated by R. Scott Walker

*Introduction à la modernité*¹ achieves this first goal without being able to go beyond it. His ideological presuppositions prevent the author from elaborating the elements of a theory of modernity from his own analyses. Without being able to borrow the substance of our essay from this book, we will nevertheless be able to avail ourselves of a good part of it. Finding in it confirmation for certain hypotheses, it is by examining this work, so stimulating by the comments it invites, that we will be attempting to move forward.

I

The central chapter of *Introduction à la modernité* attempts a response to the question, “What is modernity?” What does “modern” mean? It is clear from the outset that the term “modern” is binomial and that it is used in distinction to “ancient”. This first binomial expression has medieval origins; in philosophy the *moderni*—particularly in the nominalist milieu—willingly compared themselves to the more analytical and instrumental contribution of Aristotle’s logic. H. Lefebvre also recalls a medieval institutional practice. “In the Middle Ages in cities with magistrates (northern France) or consular cities (southern France), that is, those with charters, newly elected or appointed magistrates called themselves “modern” while those whose term was expiring referred to themselves as “ancient” in relation to the “moderns”. The latter term included a double idea, that of renewal and also of regularity in renewal. The election took place according to a manner (*modus*) fully determined by the charter and municipal tradition” (p. 169).

This first ancient-modern antithesis seemed to attract to itself the apparently less significant meanings of *modo*: *at present* and *in the manner of* (ablative of *modus*). This attraction introduces into the general idea of the “new” an element of fashion (in the sense of that which is being said, done or worn at present) and opens a perspective—more interesting to follow—on fashions as methods and techniques in a world of artifices; and we will be

¹ Editions de Minuit, 1962.

seeing how to situate them in the still imprecise complex of modernity.

And Lefebvre was certainly correct to distinguish in the modern the disposition of holding as valid only whatever breaks with the past and of tasting only what is in style.

A second basic duality appears with the notion of *artifice*, opposed to the natural and to *nature*. This can be seen in the discussion of styles, for example in flamboyant Gothic—in immediate proximity to nominalism—or in Rococo and especially in the “modern style”. The quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns sets in opposition the admirable and majestic certitudes of tradition with “the joy, easy and insolent, of feeling in oneself the flow of a young life, even ephemerally; it would be preferable to bet on the present rather than on the eternal”.²

Or else virtues *newly* discovered (but in fact ancestral) come to be preferred to aristocratic refinements, virtues of a people which sings and dances: Rousseau as opposed to Rameau.

Let us first consider that idea of modernity which rejects tradition or dominant customs, which innovates even to the point of rapidly renouncing anew that which is lasting in this very innovation. And let us retain the hypothesis that, more than in its themes, modernity consists in the *means*—and thus the methods and techniques—by which it is possible to measure the progress of reason, itself understood as that logical instrumentality going back to Aristotle’s *organon* to which medieval nominalism accorded such an innovative importance.

A third duality—which is highly complementary to the second—deals with the emancipatory aspect of modernity, emancipation being opposed to enslavement to a tradition, to *mores*, to a morality which are generally associated with religious values and images; to a register of ancestral principles, which are often better preserved in rural areas and which Heine’s expression strikes with unflinching aim: *Stadluft macht frei*. The symbolism of the city can then be fully inserted into this emancipatory dynamic, and with it the double reference proposed by H. Lefebvre: Baudelaire and Karl Marx.

Baudelaire: “The spectacle of the elegant life and of the thou-

² Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne*, Paris, 1961, p. 26.

sands of floating beings who move around underground in a large city—criminals and kept women—the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and the *Moniteur* prove to us that we need only open our eyes in order to know our own heroism.”³ As for Marx, he is the philosopher and sociologist of the city *par excellence* inasmuch as both emancipation *by* the bourgeoisie and emancipation *from* the bourgeoisie were associated with the development of cities and “burgs”, then of an industry which snatched from the countryside the new social forces whose emancipating power was condensed by the young Marx in the concept—then still purely formal—of the proletariat. The negative man, dialectically speaking, is a pure product of urban modernity. Or, as H. Lefebvre wrote, “Anti-nature became a social environment and set itself up in the modern city” (p. 180).

Newness, artificiality, emancipation: these three aspects of modernity begin to present a unity of meaning which is totally antithetic to the trilogy of tradition, nature, establishment. In the common political mentality, this opposition is equivalent to that between the right and the left, which shows to what degree this opposition is sensitive to ideologizations and to what an extent it is basically ideological itself.

Before seeing if this series of dualities has a methodological significance and future (which Lefebvre affirms by annexing them to dialectical contradictions), we can ask for what reason we speak of *modern times*, universalizing in a historical period what would seem to exist only in relation to its opposite. Let us accept that “ancient” and “modern” form a pair of opposites which can describe only simultaneous and synchronous conditions, or alternating episodes of modernity and of reaction within history which nothing allows terming “modern” as a whole.

Or it would be necessary to admit that within a *time*, taken as a period of history or as a unit marked by certain cohesion, there is an “alternating current”, the pole of modernity being the one which makes history move forward, the motor for continuous innovation and for unending progress. Questionings and (dialectical) breakings-off line themselves up one after another as so many indicators of modernity following the rule of an immanent logic of historical development. “Modern”, filled with this progressive meaning, thus determines the general pace of a society which

³ *Curiosités esthétiques*, “De l’héroïsme de la vie moderne”.

understands itself through its successive but continuous changes and which is by this very fact opposed to the static quality of traditional societies.

By following these suggestions, which have become practically self-evident, we might be led to see a correspondence between modern times and the predominance of societies and cultures issuing from the break with tradition (ancient, medieval) at the risk of forgetting how new traditions were formed and of becoming insensitive to the extraordinary changes experienced in the ancient world by societies infinitely less rigid than is still all too often claimed.

History thus appears as an area hardly appropriate for a reflection on modernity; and it is less in the relationship between ancient-new or ancient-modern that the features of modernity will be drawn than in what is suggested, for example, in the concept of the *Modern State*. A State becomes modern less by reason of its contact with a society constantly seeking innovations than because it makes its administrative methods more rational, better evaluates the major juridical (positive) and social balances, thereby gaining in stability and permanence, even in countries with great governmental instability. Can it be, then, that along with the modernity of its functioning there is a value to duration—if not ancientness—and to establishment: a paradox which an ideological modernism would have to contest in the name of that progress whose corollary would be the decline of the State and the emancipation of the citizen from all governing power?

These various hypotheses manifest a divergence between a macrohistorical meaning of “modernity” (denoted by the notion of “modern times” and by the idea of a division into servile humanity and free humanity) and the determining of cultural sectors which, because of the technological progress which can affect them, are also denoted as sources of modernity. Then the right to innovation and freedom from certain moral principles moves by way of the conquest of new areas opened to experimentation: psychology, sociology, biology, etc.

These general conceptions, of a socio-historical character, make modernity as universal a principle as revolution; or at least, according to Lefebvre, it is “its shadow, its dissipation and sometimes its caricature” (p. 233). But they also risk overlooking something

essential and much more specific which is the *rationalization of means*, and of means which, under the pressure of modernism itself, succeed in determining the goals pursued and in engendering values in which are expressed a technological “perfectibilism” freed of every other consideration. It is in terms of the means that progress is measurable and that progressivism becomes truly scientific. It is in the universe of means that rationalizations are equivalent to modernizations. In this perspective modernity would be the search for a constant harmony between ever more dependable and effective means and ever more ambitious ends through new applications of these advanced techniques or of this organizational rationality.

But even more, this modernity could be manifested in the realization of quite ancient dreams which have until now remained in the state of fiction or of Utopia. With modernity the distance between dream and reality is removed, and one can see realized rationally what the imagination feigned producing with unverifiable “means”. We can ask if these dreams themselves do not, in what they contain of modernity, point up archaisms which have been overcome solely from the point of view of their meaning—impotent dreams then, but a premonition of today and of tomorrow. Once again the concept threatens to explode, and it is this impression of being unable to control it which provokes the audacity to exceed suggestions received up until now.

II

I am proposing a starting point other than the one given by traditional schemas: ancient/modern, past/future, tradition/innovation. If there is a common reference in all these formulations, it can be summarized in the idea of *progress* and it makes of modernity a historicist concept. However, the progressive presupposition upon which the use of the concept “modern” rests is not criticized even when it has obviously ceased being explanatory. The kinds of “progress” for good and bad which we can witness every day at present cannot be ordered to a Progress in whose trace could be read the meaning of history.

The problem must be re-examined from the beginning and

given an ontological formulation and no longer a historicist one; there has been a change from civilizations which knew only three regions of beings to a civilization which should be conceived as deriving from *four* regions of beings. Modernity would be rendered by this *quadriga* (different, true enough, from Heidegger's *Geviert*) whose appearance in historical time is, in fact, both a breaking-off and a revolution.

We are calling "regions of being" whatever can exist in a logical statement responding to the structure of a "world", and we admit that classical metaphysics, with its subdivision into *theology*, *psychology* and *cosmology*, integrated into a systematic whole the "worlds" of the gods, of men and of nature-cosmos. This triple division of being is the basis of the theory of progress in that it posits man as coming from *nature* to attain progressively a future state of *spirit*, close to the ideal, if not the *divine*. And inasmuch as progressivism conceives of the process of humanization as one of education, it is the figure of Robinson Crusoe and with him all the heroes of the 18th-century *Bildungsromane* which illustrated the education of man snatched from the state of nature and led to the state of reason.

The triple vision of being (or of being as a whole, as Heidegger said), where the divine has been progressively deposed in the ideals of humanity, was dispersed in the 19th century due to the effects of a new reality, of a fourth order of being. For a long time considered to be simply productions of man and consequently as belonging to the human sphere, machines and technical artifices finally succeeded in creating an increasingly automated system on which man today is irreversibly dependent. Without liberating himself from his dependence on nature, man now also depends, even if in other regards, on this new realm of beings which I will from now on refer to as the "construct".

Modernity was an idea, a descriptive and interpretive concept so long as reality had not changed ontologically—or as long as no one was aware of this change. The fact of modernity derived from the industrial revolution, but its full effect has only been felt since the organization of human societies *has been determined by the construct* engaged in a process of self-generation.

The world today is made up of the four regions of the divine, man, nature (the surrounding universe not produced by man) and

the construct (the surrounding world produced by man). To speak of technique is insufficient when describing the system of the construct, for it is not enough simply to consider the products of our know-how and the means used to produce other means. Consideration of *production* should give way to consideration of the *system*, and of a system which is escaping from man just as the system of the universe still escapes him.

It has already been stressed that man has entered into a second kind of dependence. Just as it was thought that with civilization man created and thus dominated his own conditions of existence, he has, in fact, set up a double for nature, a power before which the classical political powers—States—discover their own limits.

Exuding a consistency and an internal logic different from the organic regulations of nature, the construct is truly a world, an order of reality, on which man depends and which imposes on him a relation to nature which is fundamentally an exploiting one and essentially competitive with the relations to nature which are the basis of culture. *Construct* and *culture* thus designate two relations which are differentiated and even opposed to man of nature. And both this “quadrate sectioning” of the world and the diversity of relations of man to nature which result from it give meaning to the term “modernity”.

Man is this being who constitutes an irreducible order of reality and who nevertheless lives essentially in relation: not only with the divine (religious relation), with other men (intersubjective relations, personal or social), with nature (as land, as landscape, as vital energy), but also with the construct and through it with exploited nature. In fact it is perhaps this entire system of relations which should be called “modernity” inasmuch as the specific modernity of the construct and of the type of relation to nature which it imposes on us influences all other relations, including the religious relation.

As for me, I would be tempted to think that the most distinctive feature of modernity, or its clearest existential influence, can be discerned in the dividing up of the relation to nature into a *constructural relation* (or one of exploitation) and a *cultural relation*, which will be seen to obey vectors aimed in opposite directions. If the one is in fact “neological” or turned toward innovation, the other is “archaeological” in its very modernity. But this will be for a later discussion.

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Before constituting a quasi-autonomous whole, a kind of world unto itself, artifacts were generally a part of culture in the sense that they were derived directly from human ingenuity and from its strategy of response to the challenges which are created by its frailty and the severity of its natural conditions of life and even of survival. Thus man has always had a double relation to nature: an *instrumental relation*, associated with his needs and first expressed in the two essential activities of hunting and of agriculture, and a largely *affective relation*, often with sexual overtones, which found its direct or indirect expression in art. For centuries these relations were interwoven just as art and craft are interwoven. Then the arrival of specific cultures—clerical, courtly, popular—and the arrival of rational and scientific knowledge, encouraged by clerics become scholars, while a part of art—for example, the novel in its erotic dimension—derived from courtly culture become literary, created the conditions for a rationalization of techniques and methods of production from which came the “construct”. With the industrial revolutions, the intensification of networks of dependence between the sectors of invention, production, communication, etc. brought forth a universe with its own laws which largely condition man’s life and that of modern societies. For it is then that a culture marked with a constitutive ambiguity can be extracted from this construct. Either it is aligned with the suggestions of modernity coming to it from the industrial world—from constructivism to design, from functionalism to futurism—and finds the resources of a modernism associated with the expression “belonging to one’s own time”; or else art expresses a relation which comes close to something altogether new in nature, something altogether different from industry’s raw material, from the forms coming from mechanization or which the machine itself manifests, by way of transfunctioning, for example, in the works of Tinguely.

If in the construct (as offspring of scientific rationality) can be found Aristotle’s essential categories—matter/form, adaptation of means to ends, rationalization of this adaptation in a perfect operation, and if the entire constructural universe is dominated by the ideology of progress and thus derives from an innovation logic (neology rather than teleology), “culture” is then faced with the

alternative of following this same path or, on the contrary, of changing the course of things by a largely archaeological movement. Perhaps we are thereby touching on a second kind of modernity, or on a more complete dialectic of modernity than that characterized by the simple orientation toward conquests provided by the latest techniques and *avant-garde* productions.

III

The Industrial Revolution was the moment when the dream of dominating nature was realized and confounded at the same time. The real system of tools and machines—artifacts—with which man at first established a master relationship, was transformed ever more clearly into a relationship of dependence which in no way takes away from his intelligence or initiative and which consequently neither objectifies nor enslaves him but which envelops him in a network of determinisms which is nothing other than the technological materialization of the determinations of nature or of the formal determinisms of reason.

To speak of an enslavement of man to the machine is today a residual discussion, imposed by the survival of zones which are still only slightly modernized by the “construct”. On the other hand there can be found determinisms which are as powerful as those of nature, combinations of causes and effects which are as strict, in which malfunctions appear more and more as almost natural catastrophes and against which a voluntarist discussion of the “supposed inevitability of the system” arises uselessly. Accidents occur therein in the same way as avalanches occur in the mountains.

Historically, the creation of this system of the “construct” may seem to coincide with the beginning of the great proletarian political revolution. This is how H. Lefebvre describes the shift to modernity. “Around 1905 [...] the outlines of Modernism and Modernity slowly emerged from the mists of history, and we can see them coming toward us by [...] 1905. A change. Technical inventions were multiplied despite the latent or avowed Malthusianism of leaders. These new techniques (which found application especially in the art of war) began to penetrate into everyday life:

electricity, the combustion engine, automobiles, airplanes. At the same time the exploration of the physical world, micro and macro, revealed dimensions until then suspected, represented or imagined but not yet understood. At the same time the reign of individualism was ending, and the era of collectivism and organization was taking shape and imposing itself. *The individual was to defend himself vigorously by looking for the area in which this defense would be possible: art, the imagination, the relative*" (p. 179).

I underline here what is consonant with "culture", haven of the individual and perhaps "the lofty interiority in which humanist values take refuge during an idealist transition",⁴ whereas the individual feels himself more and more profoundly "conditioned" by the system of organization of the "construct" and by its political extension, the mass movements and parties which are themselves assembled like machines.⁵

The "construct" which modern man encounters as circumstance and surrounding, as *Umstand* and *Umwelt*, favorable or catastrophic—an airplane accident is no longer fundamentally different from a mountain-climbing accident—is largely unconnected with the pure materiality of nature. If nature is thus reduced to a role of reservoir of the raw materials and energy necessary to make the "construct" function, this latter does not necessarily engender a "materialist vision of the world". But it sets outside itself, in another modernity which can be evoked by contrast, a radically opposite relation to nature which we generalize under the term "culture" for lack of a better word.

What we are going to attempt to describe in reference to H. Lefebvre's remarks on *art* as the refuge of the individual is as much a part of modernity as the "construct". It is necessary to emphasize this, for the description of the "construct" corresponds largely to what, by way of innovation and rationalization, converges in the notion of "progress" and manifests a futurist orientation. And capable of introducing into "revolutionary" social practices elements borrowed from the formation of hypotheses in which "knowledge is invented" or Utopias calling for experiential verifi-

⁴ Henri Van Lier, *Le Nouvel Age*, Tournai, 1962, p. 70.

⁵ An interesting study could be made of the mechanical model employed in the "assembly" of the Communist party by Lenin.

cation, this modernism could imitate the conditions for scientific progress, but also be extended into an art which is willingly called “modern”, visibly marked with the sign of the “construct”, and would be radically distinguished from another form of art—and from another concept of culture—for which Henri Lefebvre does not hesitate to use the notion of archaeology. “Among artists, some reveal the mutual penetration of the abstract and the concrete, of anti-nature and nature [...] They deliberately replace perceived continuity with constructed discontinuity. Others, giving consideration to the strangeness of the real and of the ‘other’ in the real, will go more or less far; they will attain other realities in order to exceed the alienated real. They thus will find symbolisms, even the most archaic ones [...]” (p. 181).

Here Lefebvre takes a decisive step. Opening up a perspective to an alternative to the construct, included in the entire progressive context which was determinant down to the futurism of certain forms of art, the author justifies a question apparently unusual in 1962, publication date of *Introduction à la modernité*, but today become almost banal, “Toward a new romanticism?” (p. 234-316).

The value of the concept of “romanticism” lies less in its traditional opposition to classicism nor immediately in its being applied by a dialectic of modernity, but in the fact that it contains specific features able to characterize the difference between “construct” and culture within the same modernity.

“Romantics call themselves ‘moderns’; they push the cult of the *now* as far as snobbism and dandyism. By that they believe themselves opposed to the men of the Revolution, and romanticism tends (and merely tends) to take a reactionary direction. But it engages itself in a new contradiction. Its modernism is resolved in a fetishism of Christianity, of chivalry, of the Middle Ages. The mask placed over bourgeois reality by romanticism as well as over its own face, does not completely close its eyes, still open to the now which it uses as point of reference since it wishes to be ‘modern’ [...] The romantic seeking his roots in archaism confuses his nostalgia with the present criticism of bourgeois society which itself is confused with criticism prior to the French Revolution” (p. 305).

From this curious bit of dialectical bravura which sees a shameful modernity spread itself out in the shadows of the Revolution we

can retain a luminous phrase which emerges from the ideological fog: the romantic, like the artist who rejects the “constructural” collective, *is seeking roots in archaism and restores the power of the symbol.*

To seek one’s roots in archaism, to reactivate archaic symbols: this is what designates the center of a disposition essential to “culture” in this ontologically quadripartite civilization inaugurated by the Industrial Revolution. But this also requires a few explanations. Archaism is no longer simply a fact of historical nostalgia—typified by the romantics’ taste for medieval art or politics. Cultural archaeology implies an aesthetic relation to nature, aesthetic in the double sense of sensation and of art; it also implies that modernity is quite radically attached to that empire of the senses which is also the kingdom of desire, to sexuality. Henri Lefebvre goes much further in the meaning of modernity when he speaks of the “reappropriation of desire” than when he refers to the romantic reaction to revolutionary rationalism. “Theorists and ideologues have eluded the problem of desire which poets had perceived and which only psychoanalysts have raised reasonably, but in terms of the abnormal” (p. 191). Radically distinguished from need and from the system of needs which, from Hegel to Marx, foreshadow the system of the “constuct”, desire is the cultural principle of modern man. “The sexual need has lost its character of need. Modern man confronts this fearful force, that desire which is born of need and which differs from need as a world is born of another world in the same universe” (p. 191).

The separation of desire and need—which is already mentioned by Lucretius as an encouragement to moderation and reason—is the separation of that which is planned even down to genetic manipulation and thereby integrated into the realm of the “construct”, and that which, as the poet perceived, derives in fact from the imaginary, from that force, more charged with memory than with projection, which leads us to the archaisms which are closest to the origins and to the symbols which signify them.

Here there is no further need to speak of desire conquered by knowledge, modernized because reduced to theoretical language and subject to technical mastery. What is important here is the descent to the sources of life and death, this slow work of memorization, or of *ana*-mnesis, which leads back to the founding myths

where the sacred rests, as we shall see later.

This archaism of desire and of dream visibly disturbs Lefebvre the rationalist, theorist of a liberating reason and a modernity made of mastery and emancipation. And though he evokes it with the features of Greek mythology, the author brings forth a highly significant paradox. "Origin, Greece offers the only ideal and the only idea possible of man... The strangest thing is that with questioning about their extent and their limits, the myths of Greece have invaded us all and with them the nightmares from which it wanted to escape...: Oedipus and the Sphinx, the Attridae, the Trojan Horse...".

There, precisely, is the difference between an origin understood as *point of departure* for an evolution bringing forth modernity, inasmuch as stages are to be gone through and innovation is to be introduced into the process of progress, where everything *pro*-duces out of a genesis and where the dominant tonality is that of a neology or teleology; and an origin seen as a *point of return*, in a regressive perspective opposed to a progressive perspective, but still as the term of a movement. To go further, or elsewhere, it is necessary to have the courage to say with Michel Foucault, "At the opposite of this return [...] is the experience of Hölderlin, of Nietzsche and of Heidegger, where the return only exists in the extreme retreat from the origin—there where the gods were repelled, where the desert grows, where *techné* established the dominance of its own will. In this way there is neither culmination nor curve but rather that incessant destruction which produces the origin to the same degree that its withdrawal at the end is then the nearer".⁶

In this entire problematic of the origin, desire has apparently the role of original nature, while thought of the relation to this nature risks being blocked at purely psychological positions. However, desire is not really defined by an origin which no longer derives from needs now filled by techniques nor from the movement of *progression* and *regression* but is rather that "destruction without chronology and without history" spoken of by Michel Foucault. It can only be given an ontological status comparable to

⁶ *Les mots et les choses*, Paris, 1966, p. 345.

the evocation of the substantiality of nature. It is in this sense that Michel Foucault's thinking tended when he wrote, "Through the domain of the original, [...] modern thinking has attempted to find man in his *identity*, [...] history and time in repetition which they make impossible but which they force to think, and to be just as he is." But at the same time this thinking of the "same", directed against creations and changes, teleonomic and neological evolutions, cannot concern desire other than inasmuch as it *is* in some way man, an opening which is filled by none of the alterations which mark off his evolutions and revolutions. It is then possible to understand that "in the modern experience the withdrawal of the origin is more fundamental than any experience, since it is in this that experience glistens and manifests its positivity" (p. 346). Which means then man in his origin is not contemporary to the time of the experience in which his mastery of the world develops.

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The harvest of new ideas is so abundant that a brief review of major themes is essential. The separation of need from desire induces an opposition between a movement of return which still derives from becoming or from *-gression*, and an identical nature, a being of desire which thought does not reach, that dialectic does not close, whose finitude (M. Foucault) contrasts with the perfection or culmination of all systems which assign a *final* culmination to all progression.

However, this identical is the term of a specific relation for which we must justify the name culture, or more precisely modern culture. According to our own hypothesis, culture is the sum of relations to this nature which man experiences in himself as desire. If the most carnal or the most vitally natural form of this relation is organized in sexuality, the most fully theorized form of this relation, turned against *techné*, or the "construct", is to be sought in Heidegger's philosophy, or more exactly in that evocation of the *consecration of the Origin, of Being*, which subverts philosophy itself as architectural discipline, that is, concerned with establishing a discussion and bringing it to its term, therefore of making it wed the "perfecting" curve of becoming. The Heideggerian reversal, the *Kehre*, where a new manner of speaking of the origin of

time was inaugurated, has also its most significant literary correspondent in the reversal of the specifically progressive theme of Robinson Crusoe in Michel Tournier's work *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. To the solipsistic exercise of a statutory and specifically modern power correspond the counterpoint of the varied forms of the relation to nature-woman and nature-mother, then to the search for new forms, which are at the same time quite ancient, in fact original, for aesthetic sensations and effects. In this sense Michel Tournier has created a masterpiece of modernity which reveals the essence of the second modernity.

Based on several indicators—obviously insufficient to serve as a basis for relatively definite theory—I am not afraid to say that the general tonality of modern culture (inasmuch as it is not just an extension of the “construct”) is “archaeological” in nature: archaeology of subject with Freudianism, archaeology of knowledge with Michel Foucault, genealogy of morality with Nietzsche, archaeology of violence and of things hidden since the origin, with René Girard. All reconquests which do not belong to a past superseded by today but to hidden and unthought-of origins, precisely and secretly present for representation in this occultation and this opacity. Here, and quite spontaneously, Heidegger's categories reappear and with them the prodigiously modern intuition of an archaeology of Being.

Moreover this reversal of perspectives, this refusal to remain prisoner to an ideology of *construction*—a search for the sure foundations of science, the construction of a system using methodical and rational procedures, construction of a “cathedral” of ideas, architectonic conception of institutions—lead to a theory of *deconstruction* and poetics of explosion which found its exemplary narrative expression in Michel Tournier.

This archaeology, as can be seen, is not held back by the psychic substance of desire, but raises desire to the level of an initial grandeur, of an *arché*, but marked with that irrational aspect which makes of it an accomplice of destiny and perhaps of the gods. It is necessary to be extremely attentive to the collusion between the archaic and the sacred and to ask about the actual bonds between the modernity which we are describing and the return to the sacred. We can only be surprised if we hold that modernity can be equated with desacralization and secularization; however, the relation to

the “gods” can also be sensed in the appearance of a fourth region of being.

The modern imagination pledges allegiance not only to a futurist possible but also to the memory of the great depths. And Freud is not any more modern for having annexed to science a field of investigation which until then had been abandoned to the irrational and for having thereby largely contributed to the “mastery” and the “reappropriation of Desire”, as Lefebvre says, than for having created an archaeological field and for having delivered modern man to the disorganization of his rational and conscious ego, for having initiated him to the dialogue with unsuspected forces, with a kind of vital universal, and for having brought him to this original place to which one returns as to one’s mother’s breast.

The notion of nature should be restudied in this perspective, where the *Rite of Spring* already essayed at the dawn of modern music and where the new Dionysian cult orchestrated by Nietzsche was created. In Tourmier’s *Vendredi*—that already referred to anti-Robinson—involution opposed to evolution reaches the imaginary reverse side where other forces appear: psychic, sacred, pagan. This reversal is also a victory over the forbidden which weighs simultaneously on the incestuous regression to the earth-mother and to the nostalgia for paradise lost.

Modern feminism is an area where this duality of evolution and involution can be verified admirably. On the one hand it seeks not only to master woman’s physiological “nature”, but her entire social being by a kind of equalizing rationalization of laws and careers; on the other hand Woman is exalted, literature is feminized, it is depersonalized in order to sacralize it. Universal term of desire, her sex is also the ideal opportunity for transgression—the modern theme *par excellence*. And as we can read in the catechism of the second modernity, Alain de Benoît’s *Comment peut-on être païen?*, “... the thesis that the prohibition against incest is a universal fact... returns once more to seek a general law and especially to interpret this general law as a break with the natural world in that the prohibition against incest is, in fact, particularly a prohibition against incest with one’s mother, and thus confirms that ancient anti-idolatry prohibition protecting the filial relation between man and the earth-mother” (p. 134). These are the spoils of Freud which are here being divided up. Under the idea of a

universal law is hidden conscience, reason, science; idolatry connotes a paganism which is less interesting for the religious reminiscences of the term than for the indices it brings of a new understanding of culture as the reversal of the movement which led to the universalizing of the “construct”. This is another way of interpreting Nietzsche’s *Umwertung* and Heidegger’s *Kehre*.

The return to the sacred to which we are here making allusion is, to our mind, the re-emergence—after two centuries of occultation—of a hidden side of modernity. Fixed on technical modernization or on the secularization of manners and of societies, the modern conscience is surprised by this resurgence of the sacred, of a sacred whose modernity appears most frequently as a break with Judeo-Christian tradition. By opposing the *holy* and the sacred, Emmanuel Lévinas denoted with singular acuity everything that is pagan in modernity which Jean Brun analyzes as a *return to Dionysius*.

The sacred is here no longer the traditional contrary of modern secularity but a double of modernity. It is then less astonishing that in industrial civilization, archaisms are no less modern—and no less subject to the laws of fashion—than all that which derives from the modernization of means and techniques. There where the fascinating meets the efficient, like a kind of modernized Utopia, science fiction themes are developed. This joining of the imaginary with the rational—characteristic of all Utopias—realizes in fiction, and with all the futurist connotations of which the imagination is capable, what Henri Van Lier hinted at in *Le Nouvel Age* (published the same year as H. Lefebvre’s *Introduction à la modernité*).

After having traced the features of this “construct” soberly called technique, after having shown that it constitutes “a world in which we move and rest; that it extends infinitely in time and space, forming not only our landscape, our *Umwelt*, but our horizon” (p. 69), the author evokes “the incalculable cultural consequences” of the creation of a “universal net, tightened, not as a result of an accumulation of devices as was the case of the machine in the 19th century, but which forms a veritable fabric where all the elements refer unceasingly to all the others, stopping to examine the inexhaustible relations of their interaction and keeping them from going beyond this border: virgin land” (p. 66).

And to designate culture, the author chooses archaisms which

are the most evocative of the origins: “Nature, Earth, Earth-Mother, Demeter, Cybele, Isis, Physis, Thalassa, Desert, River, Mountain—which, with its thousand other faces, has been for man, since the origin, the basis of all his values... It bore all poetry, all plastic arts, rhetoric, philosophy, liturgy, in sum all humanisms.” And this is an evocation of culture which is extremely close to the one we have been proposing ourselves.

But our difference of opinion arises when reading what follows. “We must anticipate (in the humanism of tomorrow) that its poetry, its plastic arts, its rhetoric, its philosophy and its liturgy can no longer be based on ancient nature. They can no longer, in their images, invoke it as horizon if it is true that concrete techniques are our horizon [...] So that no matter what, the fruitful cultural themes will be located within this median reality in which the new technical mentality encloses us. Is this field sufficiently vast, sufficiently deep, in comparison with ancient nature, to nourish the unquenchable need for renewal, for creation of humanism?” (pag. 70).

The answer to this question is too briefly positive, too optimistic or confident in the predictable not to lack analysis. It is based on the idea of the substitution of a new nature for the ancient one. It sidesteps the fact that this “new fabric”, this “new world” of the “construct” creates a new relation with nature and thereby conditions a culture which, for itself at least, bypasses that unique horizon of technique. Perhaps in 1962 it still was not known that there was an awakening of a new sensitivity... which Henri Lefebvre sensed, however. This sensitivity nourished particularly the ecological movement, the only political *novum* since the ideologies of the 19th century were made concrete in the classical parties. But the ecological movement is in itself but one facet of the tip of an immense and deep iceberg, where survive (in the sense of supernatural and sur-real) the myths of an earth-mother “source of life, maternal breast, burning fire, fruitful warmth, nature so fascinating and fearful, more sacred, but who despotically [...] sows epidemics with one hand and healing with the other” (p. 69).

But this is not just simply “ancient nature”, but the pole and result of a new relation with nature which appeals to the imaginary at the very moment when it surrenders its last material and energetic resources to that ever more powerful captor who is

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Homo technicus.

By way of conclusion, “Antimodern” can then mean two things. Either the nostalgia for a pre-industrial age, ideologically reactionary and incapable of handling even the modernity of the culture to which it refers; or a protestation—at times supported by modern technology itself—against this renaissance of the sacred in the name of a holiness which makes itself discipline and which polices the spirit under the title of “destroying the sacred groves” which B.- H. Lévy, in *Testament de Dieu*, obviously borrowed from Emmanuel Lévinas.

A protestation raised out of the concern of not restricting man to a scientific-technical future alone, nor to the preservation of an original integrity, but of committing him to the risks commanded by the humanly fruitful sense of the Law. There is there a noble and serene manner of prophesying at the very heart of modernity.

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