

Between the Translating City and the Immediate City

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1 INTRODUCTION .

It is often said that a City “emits messages” . What kind of messages ? We consider four hypothesis :

- The Translating City . The City is in charge of some collective education . Values, and a Doctrine, are exhibited thanks to monuments and symbols . The Future is concerned . The French urban planner Marcel Poete has used the term “mysticism” . “Mysticism” is about Religion, the King, the Nation, Science, Progress ... See the three Zola’s novels, “Lourdes” , “Rome” and “Paris” . The main character finds the peace of his soul in Paris . Lourdes is ferociously criticized . The train, which is full of sick persons, is a vain (inefficient) circulation . At the opposite, the circulations in Paris are efficient . Rome is too much obsessed by its glorious past . Paris is the modern city . The meaning of the city is decoded . There are four parts, corresponding to Labour, Education, Commerce, Richness and Luxury . These activities are coordinated . The name of the project : Progress . Hence, Hope ... The crisis of the Translating City dates from 1930 . It has been described by Siegfried Kracauer . Is a renewal possible ? There are many obstacles . See our other hypothesis . In the Jane Jacobs’s views, the idea of “City Beautiful” has bad consequences . And obviously, tribalism or commercial purposes are not compatible with the Translating City .
- According to Jane Jacobs, the City is the place where inhabitants solve their problems . The worse segregation is when there are quarters inhabited by people without problems, and other inhabited by people unable to solve their problems . Social diversity matters very much . The places in the city should allow people to be in touch, observe one another, speak of their problems, collective or individual . It should not be imposed, since social life needs some secrecy (Simmel) . Some individuals are able to construct the social circles (Simmel) to which they belong, other need people near from them, in the same quarter, giving them advices and help .
- The city can be considered as a décor allowing scenographies and spectacles . The purposes are commercial . Medias are involved . An example is interactive billboards . There is no more a street, there is a shop . The first to describe the commercial purposes of the City was the sociologist Simmel . The City is the place for fashion, commerce and efficient circulations .
- Some sociologists (like the French sociologist Maffesoli) believe in the hypothesis of tribalism. A tribe is a group of individuals wanting to share emotions . They have some passion in common . They want to enjoy the present time . They are interested in these themes : the past, the places, Nature, divinities and myths ... They believe in utopias . Inside the tribe individuals communicate, but they do not communicate very much with people outside . For them, some places in the City (plazas, stadiums, places where to meet ...) are rich of symbols . These places trigger participation . According to the hypothesis of tribalism, the tribes are necessary to the “adjustment”, the mutual acceptation which allows the unity of Society .

In this context, what is the role of these Information Technologies involved in urban life : cameras, mobile phones, Freenets ... ?

2 THE CRISIS OF THE TRANSLATING CITY .

In his book, published in 1930, on the clerks in the large German cities, Siegfried Kracauer has described the “emptiness” of the City : no faith, no hope in the collective destiny . The Monarch has no more a role . People do not believe in the Entrepreneur (individual worth, morality) . The clerks are numerous, but they are treated like workers . They loose their jobs . They carry out impersonal tasks . They have time for leisure and see films triggering dreams .

In his book on the detective novel, Kracauer has described the derealized, reified Society . He starts from the Kierkegaard’s philosophy . There are two “spheres” , the upper one, the Absolute which is unknowable, the lower one, Immanence, human nature and only it . The “integral” human being, who achieves the Essence

(the Reality) , lives in a state of tension between the two spheres . He achieves the Essence during rare moments . Living in the upper sphere only, he is a mediator, a priest . Living in the lower sphere only, he is a fallen being . In the detective novel, this tension disappears . It is the realm of intellect, of the Ratio .The detective is the infallible Ratio's agent . The novel tells an absurd process, without a beginning and an end . The characters are disembodied . For instance, the Police is in charge of Order, without cogitating about what it is . It is not infallible . Only the detective is infallible . He is without any personality .

A reflection on Order is not possible, since the tension between the Ethics and the Law does not exist, the spheres of Absolute and Immanence have disappeared .

Perhaps, there is an aesthetic trick . There is a simple tale, which is constructed and well constructed . The reader follows a clear path, to discover how Truth and Morals always exist in the City .

The constant difficulties of the relationship with others are replaced by a temporary "exoticism" . The reader's intellect is challenged . Hence, his fears . When the story ends, it ceases . The Ratio has shed light on the events . The enigma is solved . Order and Law go back . The single cause of the reader's fears was the opacity (not the perennial existence of Evil) . He is reassured .

Today videogames are constructed like that . The City is a décor . The Ratio is replaced by the Winning Strategy . When the player has understood the Winning Strategy, his interest in the game ends . These games are without educative value . Perhaps, they are a cruel reminder of the role of urban planning, sometimes, when it served strategic purposes .

The "emptiness" in the City is created by the end of the tension between the Absolute and the Immanence . According to Kracauer it is like the hall of an hotel . He compares it to the Communion of the believers in a church .

The failure of the Translating City is obvious . There is no more an emission of messages, clearly structured, with a meaning concerning Society, in the City . It favours the attempts by groups, to attract the people's attention thanks to meetings and demonstrations . This evokes what Walter Benjamin has said on films : it is no more the time of clear understanding and the "aura" , it is the time of "shock" . See the example of "smart mobs" . To attract the people's attention, they trigger a shock .

Why this failure ? We find explanations in the Karl Mannheim's book "Ideology and Utopia" (published in 1929) . He examines the role of ideologies and utopias . He considers four utopias : the "millenarian" , the communist/socialist, the liberal/humanitarian, the conservative . All are passionate, except the liberal one . The millenarian utopia tells that an upheaval of Society can create a better life, immediately⁽¹⁾ . The communist/socialist utopia tells of Totality and determinism, and is materialist . The determinism explains the past, but mainly the future . The present generates the future . It is paramount to understand how . It is a kind of trial . The important ideas are only those in accordance with the well understood determinism . The economic structure has a determining role .

The conservatives believe that the past determines the present . The goal is to be worthy of the glorious past, today . They believe in the worth of the cultural heritage . The liberal utopia is the only one which does not insist on the Totality, the determinism, the present, and materialism . It does not consider that the conditions of life determine the ideas . On the contrary, ideas determine the conditions of life . A straight line leads to a better society, at some pace . The liberal utopia, contrary to the other ones, is not passionate⁽²⁾

When he forecast a less important role of utopias, Karl Mannheim was wrong . In the years following the publication of his book, the utopias he has described, have moved the crowds . After 1945, the more influential doctrine is the Ordorealism (Michel Foucault) .

The better governance is not a theme for scenographies and spectacles in the City . It is because of the features of the liberal utopia : it is not passionate, it does not insist on the present, it does not speak of Totality . It is why the crisis of the Translating City continues .

Modern Art is a recourse, to obtain that people like the centers of the cities . Some city centers are known as successes, thanks to modern architecture : Amiens, Le Havre, Agadir ... Modern architecture in the city

⁽¹⁾ A proponent of the worker's self government, Guy Debord, exposes a theory on urban space in "La Société du Spectacle" .

⁽²⁾ It is also exposed in the book of the Austrian liberal economist Ludwig von Mises, "The Human Action" .

centers can be accepted and liked by people, because of the features of modern art : proximity, opposition to tradition, simplicity (geometrical shapes) .

We find ideas on this topics in the Francastel's book "Peinture et société" . He examines the paintings of the Quattrocento . At this time, the "space in perspective" theorized by Alberti, is slowly prevailing in the paintings . It will be very much used by the painters, in the 17th and 18th centuries . The "mythical thought" had a role . The myths of Power, Richness and Luxury are useful to the community . The symbolic gift is the cement of Society . Often the painters have worked for rich and powerful customers (in Florence, Venice) . They have imagined the architectural styles to come . The painted city predates the built up city . This confirms the Marcel Poete 's "mysticism" . Marcel Poete believed in an imitation of Greek and Roman antiquity, concerning the city centers : streets with archways and a backdrop at the end, fountains, public gardens, monumental crossroads . With the Alberti's "space in perspective" , something new appears . It will produce the monumental city of the 18th century (Bath, Washington) and 19th century (Paris, Vienna) .

According to Francastel, Art is linked to Rite . The Artist wants to trigger the acceptance of some myths . Today, the painters invent a new figurative space . They invent a new language using images, as scientific and technicians invent new languages . Therefore, if the language which is invented by the painters goes with the evolution of Society, there should be a "resonance" between the modern architecture in the center of a city (imitating the shapes of painting) and people . A condition is to let the artists express themselves (not the "mysticism" of Marcel Poete, which implies that the meaning of messages is chosen by those ordering the work) .

Examples are :

- The new shapes obtained by computing (Frank Gerhy) .
- Sculptures evoking the mathematical topology .
- The "open space" . According to Francastel, some painters have imitated the roman frescoes . The character is at the center of the painting, livening up the space, but locally, while surrounding him there is a vast and mysterious space .

According to Francastel, the evolution of Art implies two kinds of artists, forerunners and other with a more educational role . The works of these artists (having a more educational role) can be attractive and charming . Therefore modern art in the center of cities can be accepted .

Take the examples of urban places which are very popular, even if they are not at the top, from the point of view of aesthetics : the Saint Michael fountain (Paris) , the Manneken Piss (Brussels) , the little Mermaid (Copenhagen) . The attractiveness is explained by the themes described by Francastel (the rite of gift as the cement of Society) : Power (Saint Michael fountain) , Vitality (the Manneken Piss) , The Waves and the Woman (the little Mermaid) .

3 THE COMMERCIAL PURPOSES OF THE LARGE CITY .

According to Simmel, the Large City allows fashion . The lower class can imitate the upper class, immediately . Hence the prosperity of the Large City . As the upper class abandons the fashion when it has extended to the lower class, fashions are replaced at a quick pace . The instant of the beginning of a fashion and the instant of its end are almost concomitant . Present and change are valued . It is like the Walter Benjamin's "shock" . Products need to be cheap . Fashion extends to other domains than clothes . An historical change was necessary : the power of the bourgeoisie . Note that the German sociologist Sombart disagrees : according to him, aristocrats made huge expenses to buy luxury goods . What matters is that there are many people paid with salaries, workers and clerks (Kracauer). It allows the lower class imitating the upper class . Fashion has two aspects : imitation and distinction . Ideas are "reduced" (because to follow a fashion is not really a choice, it is imitation) . There is a confusion between qualitative and quantitative : the individual following the fashion follows it more than the other, he does not make something different . Fashion reconciles contradictory trends in life : the universal and the particular (it corresponds to imitation and distinction) . Life in the Large City implies many stimulations and changes : hence awareness and nervous intensification . However individuals protect themselves from too many shocks, thanks to

indifference . Hence, the jaded mindset . Also, they are reserved . In the Large City, one finds awareness, indifference, reserve . In the small City, one finds habits, sentiment, stronger links between individuals . In the large City, often the other is considered with antipathy, because he makes other choices (than oneself) .

A century after, these descriptions are still pertinent . The Large City is a décor for scenographies, spectacles, parades . As it is noticed by Simmel, it is difficult to sell new goods to jaded, indifferent people . However scenographers want to attract thousands of people in the same place, at the same time. Medias are involved .

Interactive billboards are an other example .

Mobiles allowing geolocated services could be used in two ways . Either visitors and tourists retrieve information on the places in the City, if they are interested in these explanations . Either they look at the landscapes of the City, less, as it is easier to retrieve information on the shops where to buy goods, from their mobiles, than search, walking and discovering the City .

The Simmel's remarks on nervous saturation are still pertinent . There are too many things to look at and to do, in the urban places . Could you walk in a city, look at the urban landscape, listen to your walkman and listen to the voice coming from a pole, giving you advices to cross the street ?

4 THE TRIBES IN THE CITY .

A tribe is a group of individuals, having an interest in common . This interest is in a topic like : clothes, Nature, myths, the past, a social cause (solidarity with a local group) , sport ... They have not a rational goal . They want to enjoy the present, to have the experience of living together, sharing some passion . According to Maffesoli, in a society where "politics is saturated" , it allows the groups in the City to accept one another . It is a kind of "adjustment" . The tribes experiment new ways of living and feeling . They influence the beliefs and the way of considering the social stakes . It is not because of reasoning, but trough the usage of symbols, attaching importance to choices concerning the everyday life or the relationship with the other . There is a kind of display effect . They do not convince, they show the possible meanings of choices, acts, ways of life .

Obviously, they can trigger an attrition of urban life . Some are discrete (the fans of astrology) . Other are sometimes vulgar or dirty (the owners of dogs) . Other are somewhat violent . They want a territory and to train people . People have to behave as they want (for instance, not to enter their territory) . We understand what is this kind of territory thanks to the Konrad Lorenz's ideas (the animals' territory) . Training, also, evokes animals and countryside . It is an attrition of urban life (social acceptability is its main feature) . Their appearance is not the appearance of those following a fashion . According to Simmel, one follows a fashion to please . In the violent tribes, they want distinction only . They exhibit signs of what they are . They wear uniforms, like in the case of supporters exhibiting the colours of their sport club . Examples of these violent tribes are bikers (in some cities) , dealers, supporters, fans of techno music ...

"Happy slapping" is an example of violent tribalism . It poses the Jane Jacob's question : "Who does use his (her) eyes to watch the street ? " . The Jane Jacob's answer was : the inhabitants . An other answer is cameras everywhere in the City, collecting data which are at the police's disposal . Those organizing a "happy slapping" seem to say : "it is our eyes" . They ape the authorities themselves . Hence the authorities' response : a law forbidding "happy slapping" (in France) .

Other tribes can help to achieve an "adjustment" . It is not thanks to rational doctrines, but thanks to sympathy, motivation, influence or beliefs ...

5 CONCLUSION .

The frame of the detective novel is still the same (except for a few authors) . Now, a team holds the enquiry . Perhaps there are disputes between the members of the team . Perhaps one of them has personal problems . It is only details . It is still the realm of the Ratio . They use Information Technologies : they know data on mobile calls, or retrieve data from databanks (photos, life stories ..) . According to Kracauer, the detective is the infallible agent of the Ratio . What matters is his mind, not the tools he uses . He perceives interesting signs that the other do not perceive . Today he could perceive an interesting sign in a huge mass of data .

We should reflect on the use of Information Technologies inside a framework allowing to understand the Reality . The Absolute and the Unknowable exist . If we forget the “relationship” (the relationship between the Absolute and the Immanence) , Information Technologies will fall into pure immanence . The Totality is known by an individual through rare experiments, progressively . Apparently only, the autonomous legality (separated from ethics) achieves the Totality . There is only a simple contrast of legal and illegal, appearing through facts . Outside the “tension” we could accept a use of Information Technologies determined by a hastily defined Ratio . We should avoid making the mistake of posing the question of the use of Information Technologies, in terms of tools only . The Integral Man should reflect on the tools and their effects, while accepting the “tension” (between Ethics and Law) .

Cameras can watch cars and people in the streets, personal data on the passengers taking planes can be collected . A reflection on the use of these technologies is necessary . The Community cannot accept an unspecified and uncontrolled use . A recourse is to destroy the data, quickly . For instance, if a toll to enter the City is acceptable, data on the number plates, which are collected to check that the toll is paid, should be destroyed one day after . It is the same, concerning these automatic radars, alongside roads and highways, which trigger fines paid by drivers .

Tribes are involved in some problems that the managers of cities have to solve . Here are two examples :

- The flight to California . Given the generous measures in favour of poor people in the State of California, thousands of people come in California, to live there, every year . Also, they are attracted by sun, the climate, the pleasant atmosphere ... Many years ago an other tribe, the hobos, were travelling through the territory of the United States, for free, by train, all year round . This tribe was studied by the American sociologists . Today the problem posed to the Californian authorities is tough, since there is not a clear criterion to distinguish between “good” and “bad” migrants .
- The fans of techno music . The tough problem is when they meet to listen to the music they like : one hundred of thousands people meet together for one day, eating and drinking ... In France, the State makes expenses and organizes these meetings in some places, far from the cities (in disused airports, for instance) .

Tribalism can explain in part, the content of the communication allowed by the Freenets in the large cities . There could be two kinds of content :

- Individuals and groups want to solve their problems : to find a job, to ask advices, to support a project ...
- The communication inside a tribe is concerned . It is communication between those in the tribe, only . They like some symbols . They want to share emotions . Even if it seems frivolous, these flows of communication have a role . Many places in a City have a symbolic meaning . Tribes are interested in these places . It allows the “adjustment” . The existence of Society implies collective representations which are common, which are shared . The “symbolic marking” of the urban space has a role . It would be vain to seek to have an influence on these tribes . Obviously, if a Freenet is watched, it will not be very much used . A feature of the tribes is their “fluidity” (their interests and goals are ephemeral) , and it makes difficult to have an influence on them .

6 REFERENCES .

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