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Logic of Expansion, Logic of Being -Integrating the Dissociated Paths of Modernity in 21st Century

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Expansion and Arrival. The Two Paths of Modernity

If we trace modernity back to its origins, to Renaissance, Humanism, Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, and organized scepticism of empirical science, we detect the idea of free development of the individual. But compared with former times people of today talk less about the idea of freedom. In western societies, freedom has become a matter of course like clean water. Nevertheless, the idea of freedom still is not fully developed.

Freedom has a double meaning: Objectively, it means systematic expansion of *opportunities*: science, technology, mobility, democratic constitutions, wealth, security, education. But there is a second, subjective meaning of freedom: the ability to make *personal sense* out of these opportunities. Modernity means building the house as well as living in it. Modernity means rationalization of means as well as coming to an end, and enjoying the fruit of ones endeavour. Modernity includes the logic of expansion as well as the logic of arrival.

Up to now, these two paths have remained dissociated. Most people have a reduced understanding of modernity, restricted to technology, science, economy, functionality, which all are organized by the logic of expansion. On the other hand, we witness an increasing salience of soft themes in the modern world, themes like happiness, sense of life, self realization, ethics, arts, religion. Those themes belong to the second path of modernity: the free use of all the options that are the result of the first path.

I will spell out the following theses:

The use of freedom which I call the second path is the essential point of modernity, while the first path, the expansion of options and opportunities, is only instrumental for the second.

The second path has not yet entered the stage of modernity; it has remained archaic and idiosyncratic – a matter of taste, hidden in privacy, beyond discourse.

But the time has come to treat the second path as a public matter, beginning with the minimal public of two persons living in an intimate relationship and ending with world society.

From Nature to Culture. The Changing Salience of Themes

Let me illustrate my third assumption by a series of examples:

Every cell-phone, I-pod, digicam, computer game or software tool is another challenge to be aware of yourself.

Broadband cable, satellite picture, wireless LAN and last-minute-check-in at the airport are giant multipliers of unknown symbolic worlds, virtual or real.

Genetics are forcing us to be philosophical: The more we are able to do and create, the more we have to talk about subjectivity. What do we want? What are we allowed to do? What are we doing?

The success of modern economy is no longer dependent only from the next step of technical perfection but from its ability of cultural self-organization, self-observation, and self-change.

The average expectancy of life in the western world is still growing two or three months every year, but what is it good for? What is happiness, what is making sense?

Mankind is starting to see itself as a world-community, but what is a good world-order?

The quintessence of all these examples is the salience of themes concerning the subject. Subjectivity is outrunning the traditional themes of modernity: natural law, machines, information processing, functional systems. This shift is not an accident; it is the inevitable consequence of modernization. To say it in only one sentence: The less people are determined by circumstances, the more they have to determine themselves.

Modern people have to face a *change of change*. To continue modern culture, they need a new technique of understanding. They have reached a level in which inter-subjectivity should

not be restricted on things, on natural phenomena, on countable and measurable topics any longer. Advanced appropriation of *nature* now is leading to the historical task of systematic appropriation of *culture*.

The Pre-Modern Way of Treating Culture in Modern Life

But on this second path, modern people are still beginners. A story of Dorothy Parker tells about Hobie and Kit, a man and a woman, who are getting on each others nerves horribly. In a sense, the story is pure sociology, because its subject is normal daily life. Dorothy Parker does a brilliant job in telling normality; her chief narrative technique is showing the rotations of a merry-go-round. She follows the scripts and patterns of her protagonists and needs a few pages only to catch everything. She describes cycles of a game between adults, as the psychologist Eric Berne analysed it decades ago. A few runs through, and the reader knows all about it.

The focus of most novels lies on the unique, singular and exceptional. But Parkers story concentrates on repetitions that happen between two people. Who does not understand what sociology is about finds a clear answer in this novel. Every existing sociological term can be reduced to this substance: repetitions that happen between people for a while.

Now the amazing thing is this: We are moving in this kind of substance day by day; we are producing it; we are transforming it; we are making it the topic of our discourses more and more – feeling prompted to do so by our still expanding universe of options. But intellectually we are touching it only on the surface. Culture is the forest that we don't see for all the trees in it. All with what we deal intuitively every day seems to get rather foggy than clear when we try to think about it or to put it into words. Hobie and Kit are key figures of the developed modern age: Human beings who intensively work on their relationship, but who hardly bring about much more than to reproduce what is getting on their nerves.

To Have or to Be? The Modernity of Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse

Hobie and Kid are living in New York. They use the subway and the telephone, products of the first path of modernity, to arrive at the beginning of the second path – and to fail there. In 1976, Erich Fromm, published his book *To have or to be?* This book became a world bestseller because it was sceptical about subways and telephones and focused the inner world. It appeared in a time when the Hobies and Kids of the world were shifting their interest from their circumstances to themselves.

In the western world the seventies were the time in which the mental food of 1968 was digested. It was the era of the psycho boom, of pilgrimage to Indian Gurus, of feministic resurrection, of sexualization of everyday life, all of this surfing on the emotional Tsunami of pop music.

What was the basic tectonic power that unchained such a worldwide movement? The Beatles put it into the answer “All you need is love“. To say it more sociologically, finally the subject itself was legitimated explicitly. The chief cultural event of the seventies was the release of individual desires that flew together in the main stream of searching for experience, emotion, self-realization. Erich Fromm's book was part of this flood and strengthened its power.

One of the secrets of Fromm's success was the title, the formula *To have or to be?*, supplied with a question-mark. In the most common words of all, this title gave expression to vaguely felt ways of living, the way of self-alienation on the one hand and the way of self-appropriation on the other. Fromm connected these two ways by the conjunction “or“, and by the question-mark he dramatized the tension between them to an existential dilemma. Following the principle of *to have*, you sacrifice your life on the altar of absurd accumulation, of things, of anonymous systems, of kafkaesque bureaucracies, of pure instrumental

reasoning. But there is a way out – the principle of *to be*: a way to deep sense, to rich experience, to real happiness, to yourself.

Twelve years ago, in 1964, a predecessor of Fromm's book had appeared – the text *The one-dimensional man* from Herbert Marcuse. Interesting enough, this book became famous only in the seventies, when its time had come. Marcuse attacked the same enemy like Fromm. In the subtitle of his book he gave a name to the evil: "The ideology of advanced industrial society". But he meant the same mode of thinking that Fromm called the principle of *to have*. Like Fromm, Marcuse plead for the opposite, for *to be*.

Clash or Separation. Common Forms of Relating "to have" and "to be"

Reading the books of Fromm and Marcuse with some distance, we recognize a time-honoured, seemingly immortal pattern. The dichotomy of *to have* and *to be* is only a new metamorphosis of an old polarity. In the museum of ideas there is a room in which the variants of this polarity are exhibited, for instance: enlightenment and romanticism, technology and nature, work and leisure, system and everyday life, realism and art, man and woman in bourgeois thinking, machine and life, brain and soul, theological and mystical forms of religious practice.

Dichotomous thinking allows only two relationships between those polarities: clash or institutionalized separation. In his film *Modern Times* Charlie Chaplin translated the relationship of *clash* into pictures. The most impressive one is the machine that literally swallows up the worker. In our days, the salient example for the clash of *to have* and *to be* is religious fundamentalism, making us yearn for the harmless, almost melodious clash some decades ago which was the refusal of the Hippies to play the game of *to have*, beginning the day with a joint and enjoying the beaches of Goa.

But the normal, daily, modern form of the relationship between *to have* and *to be* is *institutionalized separation*. It may occur as separation of specialized roles, for instance between man and woman, between technical and emotion-oriented professions, between academic disciplines like physics and literature or art. Or it may occur as a separation of places between which people commute incessantly, and as a separation of times they stay in the two logics of action, between matter-of-factness or fantasy, play, emotion, joy of life, magic and religion. People commute between airports and beaches, between business partners and intimate partners, between working places and shopping malls, between information services and second life in the internet, between subway and church.

Bound to Dichotomous Thinking. The Anti-Modernity of Fromm and Marcuse

In a sense, Fromm and Marcuse were up to date and out of date at the same time. They gave a voice to the interest for the subject, but they rejected modern rationality. In the history of ideas this is a frequent pattern. There are many Fromms and Marcuses. Sometimes they appear as a pack of wolves, swelling to big movements, sometimes they remain lonely, roaming about since centuries as constant companions of modernity: mystics, romantics, pietists, esoterics, child of nature, Ramblers, Hippies, little Rousseaus, little Thoreaus, little D. H. Lawrences.

All of them are caught in a dialectic trap. Basically, they preach anti-modernity. They claim to be "alternative", protesting against what Max Weber called "Zweckrationalität", absolute rationality of means, the "cage of steel". They are right in attacking the reduction of modernity only to the logic of *to have*, but they regularly go beyond that and attack modernity as a whole, in a double sense: Firstly, they stigmatize the world of expansion, the machine, the functional system as the realm of evil; secondly they leave subjectivity and culture in romantic darkness instead of trying to illuminate it by the light of modern thinking.

If we look at Marcuse's book free of emotions, with the same cold logic which he regards to be part of the realm of evil, we detect a contradiction between title and text. If "one-dimensional man" is meant critically, it implies the call for a better alternative, which only can be the "two-or-more-dimensional man". But in the quintessence Marcuse propagates only another kind of one-dimensionality. Like Fromm, he connects *to have* and *to be* by the conjunction "or". Marcuse remains on the simple level of *dichotomous* thinking. He does not reach the level of *dimensional* thinking.

Dichotomies are like *pots* – you belong to pot 1 or to pot 2. Dimensions are quite another thing; they are not pots, they define a *field* with many possible positions. So Marcuse missed the complexity he implicitly promised in his title. He only substituted a form of one-dimensionality by another. The time was not ripe for real two-dimensional thinking – but now, I pretend, it is.

Modern people have developed a style of hopping between islands of calculation and islands of feeling. More and more, they become artists of zapping between different modes of thinking. Referring to Fromm and Marcuse, their way of life could be characterized as sequential one-dimensionality between *to have* and *to be*. Living like this represents not yet really an integration of the two dimensions but perhaps it is a step forward. Anyhow, more and more people have left behind the restrictions which Fromm and Marcuse suggested under the label of progress. They try to combine the two chief aspects of human existence, *to have* and *to be*, even though in a separated, sequential form.

The Hobbling Walk of Modernity and its Explanation

Referring to the two unequal halves of modernity by the title *To have or to be?* Erich Fromm again tried to split the whole like many other critics before him and afterwards. They misunderstood modernity as development of microchips instead of development of the individual. They constructed a dichotomy instead of a complementary relationship. And so they ended up rejecting the microchip, the factory, the system, and they interpreted consumption as slavery.

Modernity proceeded through the centuries with a hobbling walk, up to now. The strong leg is the logic of expansion, or Fromm's principle of *to have*. The weak leg is the logic of *to be*.

How can this asymmetry be explained? Basically, it is easy to understand why the logic of expansion is stronger than the logic of being. We only have to look at it from the viewpoint of sociology of knowledge. The logic of expansion can proceed on the solid ground of objectively measurable facts. It allows intersubjective discourses, exchange of knowledge, clear definition of failure and progress, and connection of different paths of development. For instance, the worldwide technological discourse on the quality of microchips is functioning precisely and free of disturbances. It results in an industry developing units with always higher capacity of storage. These outcomes are understood by other industries, by brokers and bankers, by advertisers, and by consumers. Altogether, the logic of expansion led to a worldwide, still expanding game. In German I call it *Steigerungsspiel* – *game of expansion*. The logic of expansion made its way through history like a machine that reconstructs and enlarges itself continuously, a phenomenon of enormous power and of ongoing stability in the course of time.

But what about the logic of being? It is the weak leg. The logic of being was always regarded to be a private affair, a matter of taste, inaccessible for discourse. So the logic of being never was subjected to even a touch of modernization, something like rationalization, progress, expansion. It remained infantile, unripe, archaic, an occasion of shrugging ones shoulders in resignation, because the task of building a sphere of intersubjectivity was regarded unsolvable and paradoxical. It seemed an impossible project to treat the subject as if

it were an object. Isn't it clear that subjectivity belongs to the tacit realm about which Wittgenstein stated "On what one cannot talk one has to be silent"?

A New Stage of Collective Learning

In a sense the present situation is similar to the situation at the outset of modern culture. In the youth of modern culture, people were fascinated by a big theme – the increase of options – but they still had to develop the intellectual prerequisites to work on it. The history of modern culture is accompanied by a process of collective learning in which people appropriated these prerequisites better and better.

Topics of thinking are changing. The present big shift from objects to subjects and culture is an incentive for searching new patterns of thinking, modes of interpretation, rules of discourse, paradigms, and perspectives – a search of still unaccustomed intellectual instruments to master the specific challenges of the new theme in focus. Collective learning is entering a new stage. People are putting formerly private themes in the centre of public discourses and transforming matters of taste into matters of discourse.

However, who *talks* about subjective phenomena must not necessarily be *competent* to do so. It is dramatically more intricate to construct a space of inter-subjectivity, if it is not about things but about subjects. Whether a machine is working well, whether a certain material has desirable qualities, whether a medical therapy is successful – all this can be measured objectively and does not raise problems of inter-subjectivity. But when the machine, the material, the therapy are at hand for everybody they change social reality. The consequence is Babylonian confusion. What is the case now? What new patterns have arisen? What has to be done about it – politically, economically, and educationally?

On the one hand questions like these should reduce uncertainty, but on the other hand they require the intellectual acknowledgement of uncertainty. Who tries to make a modern scientist be a follower of this idea, however, must have nerves of steel and a thick skin. The inevitable aggressions are due to the fact that the methodological permission of ambivalence, vagueness and not-falsifiability provokes the core identity of modern scientists like the toleration of cockroaches would provoke the core identity of a vermin exterminator. Uncertainty is disgusting. But the lecture of uncertainty is inevitable in the collective curriculum. So the refusal makes the impression of an infantile act of defiance. To be cross about the message means to be cross about reality.

Just imagine this: Natural science and its implementation into daily life since the 18th century would have happened without the still ongoing fascination of the public? We probably would believe that there are little manikin behind the TV-screen. But this exactly is the standard on that we communicate about culture. Cultural sciences are not yet ready to deal with this historical task. Sociology, a leading discipline in the sixties and seventies, nowadays is struggling for attention from a standing room only, mumbling comments that nobody is really interested in, while in the same time politicians, physicists, neurologists, entrepreneurs, and journalists cheerfully sociologize, only equipped with daily life know-how and ready wit.

What we can see is a swelling discourse about cultural phenomena, in which everybody can state everything. The level of modern age we have reached so far forces us to talk about culture, but we do this in anarchy. Other than in natural science, technique, and economy there is no inter-subjective sphere, there is no accepted meta-level, no obliging way of reflecting and talking. What we have is Babylonian confusion.

The Actual Deficit of Modernization

So the time has come to revise Wittgenstein's dictum. Of course, Wittgenstein is right in a sense. Everybody feels an exclusive personal universe of meanings beyond communicability within himself. On the other hand, after a time of interaction the distance can be reduced, by

talking, observing, supposing and correcting each other. In spite of all misunderstandings, in spite of the daily flood of premature conclusions misled by false models of subjectivity, in spite of stupid typologies, most of us already have made the experience of partially being recognized and understood. Wittgenstein's dictum is not to be applied on subjectivity as a whole. There are ways of partial approach, degrees of understanding, methods and rules to establish limited intersubjectivity concerning the subject.

To unfold this still unexplored space of discourse and self reflection could be the next big step in the process of modernization. While the logic of expansion reached higher and higher levels of perfection, people got more and more aware of a deficit. As for *to have*, they constructed an admirable logic of action, but as for *to be*, they still resemble Hobie and Kit getting on each others nerves, governed by latent psychic and social mechanisms.

For Wittgensteinians, it may sound naive to state a deficit of modernization in the realm of subjectivity. But it may be helpful to alter Wittgenstein's dictum in the following manner: "On what one *can* talk one *should* talk." Modernization means reasonable talking. The actual deficit of modernization can be described as a deficit of reasonable talking concerning three topics: What precisely is the logic of *to be*? What do we see if we use the logic of *to be* as a point of view? How should we integrate *to have* and *to be*? If you want to see the size of the challenge, just imagine Herbert Marcuse as an industrial and Erich Fromm as his marketing manager.