

POSTMODERNISM AS A SYMPTOM

Every crisis implies a dynamic situation, a process in which a change of paradigm takes place. The crisis is a transit, the path already travelled which allows us to enter a new situation; it is also the announcement of an imminent transformation, a change in direction. The beginning of the crisis and prelude to the change make themselves known by the apparition of anomalies, that is to say, by verifying the fact that the expectations induced by a paradigm have been violated. As Baudrillard says, anomalies are not clear symptoms, so much as strange signs of decay, of the breaking of a secret rule of the game, which having been broken does not allow reversibility, but imposes a search for new rules to the game. The transitory stage of the crisis –that is to say, the stage in which anomalies appear– is an active process which implies both disorientation and hyperactivity. Disorientation because we have got rid of the old view of life and have not yet found anything to take its place; hyperactivity because the lack of rigidity which derives from the slackening of the old paradigm allows the proposal of new visions, the election of new models. In our opinion, the postmodern condition is not a clear sign of the end of a crisis so much as the sure symptom of our being right in the middle of a transition stage. Therefore, postmodernism is the tangible manifestation of a string of anomalies which reject the previous model, rather than the stage in which a new model appears which is accepted by the majority. Dialectically speaking, the postmodern stage is characterized more by its negative quality (rejection of the previous society) than as a positive factor which can overcome the old modern world.

The predominantly negative character of the postmodern condition is to be found in the characterizations which have been made of it: the painful abandonment of rationalist optimism, the death of metaphysics, incredulity towards metastories, the trial of reason, the deterioration of the traditional models of political representation, negation of the question of sense, dissolution of the subject and of things, the end of history, apparition of a critical self-awareness of late capitalism, a game of simulation, a world where everything is absurd but nothing is surprising, the death of ideals, dissipation of that which is old, loss of the power of illusion, mutation of codes of ethics and aesthetics, the occurrence of indifference, the rejection of the ideology of compromise and the morality of effort, the questioning of the foundations of modernity, the decline of ideologies, the collapse of order based on that which is self-evident... There is no definition of postmodernism; rather, its meaning is more closely tied to the previous stage, which it negates, than to the apparition of a new one. The typical suffix "ism" of innovatory trends is absent and replaced by the prefix "post", in this way coming



even closer to that which it dismisses. So, taking postmodernity as an anomalous symptom, its manifestations do not seem so originally different to those of other, earlier crises. Postmodernity is that condition which establishes its permanence in the unstable, its absence of authority, of common reference point. During this period of instability there is an obvious change of behaviour: we pass from the constrained identity to the peculiarity reserved in codes, from the autonomous self (Kant) to the minimal self (C. Lasch), from the discourse of the subject to the preponderance of the discourse of the object, from hard philosophy to philosophy as a publicity slogan, from identity to appearance (fashion), from being to seeming, from hope in ideals to immediacy of action, it is the time of trivialization, of the discourse of forms, of the absence of historical responsibility, of the loss of conscience.

"I invoked the spirits and I will no longer be able to rid myself of them", says Goethe in a poem. The mistake of the postmodern condition lies in wanting to convert the anomaly into a new paradigm. Settled in chaos one can believe that disorder and confusion are connatural to us. We have come to a point where whatever legitimized a new answer –reason– has itself apparently been delegitimized. To install oneself in the lack of meaning implies that "for the future nothing can be accomplished, and the future is not ruled by a great unity in which the individual can lose himself entirely as an element of superior value" (Nietzsche). Not wanting to take on the wise stoical despair or the intense existentialist desperation, the postmodern condition wants to disbelieve the metastories, an aesthetically void training disguised with a superficial, empty beauty. Having secularized the transcendent stories –even those of Reason– postmodernity runs the risk of reducing itself to sacrilege of the immanent. This is the danger of the new sterile priesthood.

If the postmodern condition has to be seen as a symptom, as a phenomenon that affects our present form of knowledge and which no longer satisfies the old modern ideals, then what postmodernity is demanding is a substitute model where reason is no longer the great idol, it is demanding a critical reconstruction of the subject, capable of autotranscending modern rationality.

Because the present signs of change –the study and emergence of new forms of sociality, the protagonism of microgroups, the new role played by a pluralized subject, the new values proposed by the peripheries, the marginal and the minority groups, the revolution of the voiceless indifferent, the marked diversity of subcultures– are, in the end, omens of the emergence of a new historical conscience which has been gestating for several decades since the end of the 19th century.

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