

New Mediterraneans?

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“There is no longer civilization when the risk is absent and a challenge no longer gives its weight to a culture.”

Michel de Certeau

■ One might, with Predrag Matvejevič¹ (Russo-Croatian writer born in Bosnia-Herzegovina), stop at the several names of the Mediterranean, to establish that it has no real *proper* name, having nearly carried them all. “The Mediterranean several names, according to the countries of which banks it bathes,” wrote geographer Mercator.

“Upper Sea,” among the Egyptians. “Great” sea or Sea that is “behind,” in the Bible. In the Iliad (that only knew the sea of Thrace and the Icarian) and the Odyssey (the sea is everywhere), in does not carry any particular name. Herodotus, who located it in the north, naturally called it “*Boreia thalassa*.” “Hellenic Sea,” to Thucydide (by hellenocentrism). The “sea that is near us,” in *Phedon* by Plato. “Mare Nostrum,” to Rome, because it bathed surrounding lands. Ibn Khaldun (as the Turks) called it “White Sea.”

“*Mediterraneus*” qualified a space in the middle of the continent, which was distinguished and opposed to “*maritimus*.” The noun “*mediterraneum*” indicated anyway what is in the middle of the lands. The word “Mediterranean” is adopted after Origenes (in *De Mediterraneo Mari*):

The Great Sea (*mare Magnum*) is the one springing in the Ocean in the West and turns southward and reaches the North. It is called the Great Sea because, compared to it, the other seas are smaller. It is the Mediterranean because it bathes the surrounding lands (*mediam terram*) as far as the East, separating Europe, Africa and Asia.

To the question: “What is the Mediterranean?” Fernand Braudel answered:

A thousand things at the same time. Not a landscape, but countless landscapes. Not a sea, but countless seas. Not civilizations, but civilizations piled up one on top of the other.

■ One must fend off the “geological” temptation, too dreamy, too exotic and too immeasurable... What is the point of digging “soil,” other than to check that we are never the first occupants, that according to the word by Auguste Comte, all the dead people accompany us in our ancient task. One must keep from making an illusory reference to seas more or less “closed” of the globe, to the likewise unlikely names, on the shores of which different peoples thrived to state that it is about there of the evidence, new Mediterranean seas. Black, Caspian and why not Baltic or Caribbean, by a fortunate effect of the geographic determin-

ism, *bis repetita placent*, the “Latin” genius would benefit “intimate” seas. It would only be left to federate these small wonders to constitute a new universal republic.

If Latinity, such as we understand it can engender Mediterranean seas, it is less in the letter than in spirit. The Mediterranean is presented as a curious paradigm. It incarnates at the same time the pluralism: which it spreads out as far as Latin America, as far as the western coast of Africa, which it also provokes, and it is then the experience of a healthy *vis-à-vis* with something else, with the one facing us. The hegemonic world, relayed in the spirits by the media hold is a world without a face to face, a world without shores, nobody looks at anybody.

The “Mediterranean” is the “space/time” of the *vis-à-vis*, if Latinity is one of the deep dynamics. It is about making available, being in the opening, hanging on as close as possible to a native plurality, which offer someone else the possible fraying toward his own otherness, toward the expressions of a universal concrete.

What is being Latin, other than recognizing the other that is in us? Other than feeling that it is never enough to be oneself? It is also, engendering, in the Socratic manner, an experience of plurality among those from whom we take the language. There is an *irony* in Latinity, this act of splitting in two the other by splitting ourselves in two.

The Mediterranean is a space in perpetual tension (even risking bursting up), which performs a kind of balance between opposites: the *closed* and *open* (a see that is a long

strait between two seas, one nearly closed, the Black Sea, the other one open over faraway seas, The Atlantic). A world of endogenous germination that irradiates all points of the globe. The *same* and the *other* (a strong identity, recognizable among all, made of open, undefined appurtenances. Any attempt of reducing one and the other is an impoverishment). *One* is the *multiple*: the Mediterranean, in spite of splits and crises, in spite of clashes, it is at the same time homogenous (even if by its light, “But bringing up the light/Suppose a shadow of doleful half”) and disparate (contrasting developments, different political regimes, unevenly explosive demography, dramas of savage migrations).

The Mediterranean is the theater, less and less geographical, *stricto sensu*, more and more metaphorical of a narration of the possible. The Mediterranean is the lobby (the matrix, Edgar Morin would say) of an imaginary “Euro-Afro-Asian,” which the most radical totalizations plays, those of unifying and reductive ideologies. Referring, here, to Latinity, is not to privilege the septentrion over the meridian, or to nourish on old empire dreams, It is, to the contrary, always moving back boundaries of the world, toward other nascent or reborn worlds. Other worlds, which try to assert their existence, in the reciprocal recognition, out of separatist withdrawals.

■ Latinity to us is a “style,” as much as a “method.” The 4 “d”: *detour*, *dissidence*, *dissention* and *decentralizing*. Latinity must be the occasion of a *detour* (according to sinologist François Jullien who suggests to us making a *detour*

through China). The occasion for us to undo unilateral points of view, operate a *decentralization*. It is the price to pay for becoming available, for giving the measure of “growth of the several.” The same François Jullien says one must create *dissension* (against the *consensus* that undermines the debate of ideas in aging democracies) and therefore make *dissidence* (in relation to a hegemonic nature world order, essentially Anglo-Saxon: Latinity is a manner of keeping alongside, there where a centrifuge force is exerted—which drives us away from the center). “Dissidence” or “counter conduct,” in the Foucauldian meaning of the term. Dissidence challenges tradition, the “counter conduct” assumes it, but resorting to it.

“Latin” pluralism is remarkably illustrated by the relation that Romans maintained with their origin, conceived as the transplantation into a new soil of something that already existed, thus Aeneas leaving Troy behind (ransacked by the Greeks) toward Latin land. The experience is the one of the beginning, says very rightly Rémi Brague.²

“To the difference of the Greeks who put their point of honor of owing nothing to anyone, not having masters, the Romans willfully confess that they owe others.”

Latinity would be this unique experience of the transmission of what belongs to no one in particular, and therefore would belong to everyone. The edict of Caracalla, which extended Roman citizenship to all free men of the Empire, draws a major part of its symbolic strength, from such “transmitting” gesture.

“Roman,” proceeds Rémi Brague, is one who knows he is taken between a classicism to imitate and a barbarity to subjugate (a barbarity that is at first interior). “Being a Roman, he says, is perceiving oneself as a Greek in relation to what is barbarian, but also as a barbarian to what is Greek.” Hence the very fertile idea of “Roman way.” There is, in this respect, a Roman *mediation*, very hard to be bypassed, for those who say they are Latin.

■ The Mediterranean (Latin, ours, but also “hellenistic” Mediterraneans, of which Candido Mendes loves to speak) is put in rhythm by a time devoted to generating. The future is not on the side of the mouth, toward which the running water would go (this is what the image of the Heraclitean river suggests), but on side of the source, the gushing of what is properly forthcoming.

“The guilty past is back in a present that purports to be absolute,” said Michel de Certeau³). One must relearn the past by inventing the present. To the concept of being, always prefer the concept of procedure. Of one thing, one might not ask “what is it” or “why is it?” but “how does it do it?”.

To the question “*Where salvation will come from?*” Simone Weil replied: “*From the past only if we love it.*” There is a “progressive” illusion consisting of believing that salvation comes from the future... Thinking progress under domination of the idea of the future, has remained a prisoner of hope, of which the imaginary and the illusion (is the role of the idea of communism in Marx). On the other hand, one

may conceive progress, not as something that would bring us closer to a future (that not existing one can only have an imagined status, but as a phenomenon at the same time of the accumulation of the past and loyalty to the past. Hannah Arendt, in a completely different point of view, said some very compatible things: there is no progress if one does not conserve the past. What allows advancing, is not to cancel all that has taken place, The idea that salvation might come from the past, that is from *loyalty* (which one can oppose to *faith*), is our manner of conceiving Latinity. A projective loyalty. What is not closed to what will be, is the render possible here and now.

■ It would be necessary to speak about “tradition of the new” or “invention of tradition,” against another tyranny, which took over from the “radiant future”: the *tyranny of the present*.

A tyranny that is the measure of “real time,” which is not historical or chronological time (which is local). The “real time,” is world, full, uniform, unique time that accomplishes, according to Paul Virilio⁴ (that we follow here) the three traditional attributes of the divine: the ubiquity, instantaneity and immediateness. This real time, potentially tyrannical, is a threat to democracy (there is an absolute power of absolute speed). Speed, which is power itself, “all power, he said, is *dromocratcale*” (from Greek *dromos*, the course), and the entire society is “a society of a course” (with the will to control a territory with “des messengers, means of transportation and transmission”). There is therefore an entire eco-

nomy of speed—the speed that changes our view of the world, our “*Weltanschauung*.” To each society, to each time its speed. So much that speeds were relative, they could be democratic, that is, shared (from the Greek battleship to the airplane, passing by the train and the car, each time there is a relative time that can be shared), today with the triumph of new technologies, with, I mention it again: “the absolute speed of electromagnetic waves, the question of the democratization of speed is asked.” Cyberspace, with the speed of waves, constitutes a real threat to democracies. It is in fact a threat in its *temporality* itself, absolute speed forbidding, for example, all sort of decision.

In support of these speed-centered analyses (it is well said that speed is the number one analyzer of our societies), Virilio proposes a set of reflections on the time/space relations: in *cyclic time* of origins, in *sagittal time* (linear time, arrow, chronological history), succeeds “*dromospheric*” *time*, according to his expression, the one of light, a global time. Cyberworld, is electromagnetic simultaneity, “real time that carries it over real space,” instantaneity that cancels the subtle game of distance and closeness that makes the close one as the faraway one. Now, as Virilio said, “the question of the faraway is of the close one, it is the question of the City.” In other words, the one of democracy. He quotes, in this respect, a very nice verse by poet René Char: “Eliminating distancing kills.”

The threat, are its terms themselves, it having in mind an Earth reduced by the retraction of the “mental chart,” an

Earth lost by disappearance of the conscience of extension, the mental loss of a “*proper world*” in favor of a *virtual world*, a loss that goes with another loss “own body” in favor of the “spectral body,” a ghostly and diaphanous figure. With this form of “chrono-totalitarian” globalization, there is the threat of great isolation. The world is lost as a distance, whence the feeling of imprisonment.

The distinction proposed by Virilio between the *territory*, which has depth, and the *middle* that risks unsettling the territory, depth disappearing “in favor of a computing exchange, is interesting.”

■ But, the territory, Patrick Chamoiseau suggests, does not extend to be established in the center, the center that places durably *under relation* the outskirts, in the frame a growing immaterial in a more and more chaotic world (in the sense of the theory of chaos: a small spasm can produce a catastrophe in the scale of everything). Édouard Glissant speaks of a “Chaos-world.” We prefer then the territory, the place that behaves in rhizome.

The territory isolates there where the place, inhabited by diversity, tends to radiate in complex manner, in a sharing game, de solidarities and exchanges, the world would thus be constituted of an infinite constellation places that will elaborate unity without uniqueness.

To providing contacts, horizontally and centrally, which is what the territory induces, is opposed by placing *under relation*, vertical and decentralized. In order to point out this “world citizenship” (against “globalization”), Édouard Glis-

sant speaks of “Everybody,” P. Chamoiseau of “open, unpredictable totality,” providing contacts that is also a project aimed at installing an imaginary of *diversity* or *complexity*.

■ The “paradigmatic” Mediterranean—which carries diversity in it, of which Latin pluralism—is a “polycentered” place. These are the Mediterraneans that open, when collective memories are restored, when they answer back, like an echo, cultures threatened of disappearance by a leveling globalization. It would be necessary to imagine a geography tailored to an axial configuration (concerned areas touching each other more by their “center” than by their border), made of nesting (actual and imaginary) and networks (at the same time held and covering).

What is at stake, through the “Mediterraneans,” is a new cosmopolitanism. He who owes something, certainly, to Stoics cosmopolitanism. With Marcus-Aurelius, we have declared ourselves willingly “citizen of the world.” He who likewise owes something to Kant’s cosmopolitanism and to the one of the Enlightenment. In the eighth proposition of *The idea of universal history to the cosmopolite point of view*, Kant tells us that what allows us to state history effectively leads humanity toward a cosmopolitical state of peace and law, is cosmopolitanism in act of its century (recurrent theme of 18th century literature, exposed in the *Academia* and spread out in sitting rooms). Kant concluded that it is allowed to expect “a universal cosmopolitical state, such that in its bosom all original dispositions of the human species will be developed.”

“Latin” cosmopolitanism will be a “concrete” cosmopolitanism (as we speak of a concrete universe). Kantian universality is further the one of the “subject” knowing in the simplicity and transparency of his decrees. An even more euro-centered universality.

There was a time when cosmopolitanism could pass as a weapon against nationalism (indeed patriotism). Heinrich Heine prophesized that this one would be in all the spirits of Europe. Ulrich Beck⁵ precisely remarks that reality has become today cosmopolitical. And gives two examples: the terrorist threat knows no border and the war in Iraq, which for the first time was treated as an internal political event.

With this paradox: resistance to globalization entails a political globalization.

To the central prison territory theory of identity, of society and politics, Ulrich Beck opposes the five principles of a “cosmopolitical optics” (whose adoption would be the necessary condition for conceptual reconstruction of perception):

1. The one of the experience of world society crisis, which is to say, interdependence perceived through global risks and civilizing destiny communities.
2. The principle of recognizing differences in the midst of world society and conflicts resulting thereof.
3. The principle of cosmopolitical empathy and change of perspective (with a virtual interchangeability of situations).

4. The principle of non-livability of a world society with no borders (and consequently redrawing new ones).
5. The principle of mixing local, national, ethnical, religious and cosmopolitical cultures and traditions.

Cosmopolitanism formulation takes from Beck the bearings of a curious manifest where Kantian universalist inspiration conjugates its effects with “realistic” strange frivolities.

What is this Enlightenment?—he writes—Have the courage to adopt cosmopolitical optics, which is to say, claim multiple identities: of living in the fashion prescribed by the language, the color of your skin, your nationality, or your religion, while being aware of the fact that, in the radical insecurity of the world that is ours, all men are at the same time equal and different.⁶

Perhaps this declaration of the sense of the world is missing. “Collective” risk, “global” risk, the fact of having gone aboard the same boat—(it is not about underestimating them)—it would be to become aware of prospective conscience. Latinity brings along, perhaps, strong of this history, a tragic dimension. Tragic is all that resists reconciliation (the one of opposites), good feelings and blissful optimism.

In the heart of this Latin adventure there is, a shared feeling of fatality. “The fatal event is not the one that can be explained by causes, it is the one that, at a given time, contradicts all casualties” (Baudrillard). There a sort of sensitivity, private attention, to the always possible turnaround of things (from positive to negative). It is no point abandoning haphazardly or the need, but to meet the challenge of this destiny.

■ Leibniz, in the preface to his *Theodicy*, distinguishes *fatum mahumetanum* (supposed destiny to the Turkish, “because it is attributed to Turks not to avoid dangers, and not even leave places infected by the plague.” The *fatum stoïcum* (which is not as black as it is made: “men were not diverted from caring for their business, but it tended to give tranquility in respect to events”). The *fatum christianum* (God is a good master, in whose hands we can abandon ourselves). We would willingly add a “*fatum baudrillardum*,” which is not far from being “*latinum*.” What does Jean Baudrillard say? Destiny has a spherical shape, “the more you move away from a point the more you get close to it.”

Baudrillard (but also Clément Rosset) loves to illustrate his analysis by the beautiful Persian satire ascribed to Farid al-Din Attar (12th century):

One morning, the caliph of Baghdad ran into his vizier who qui se threw himself on his knees, pale and trembling:

— I beg you, Sire, Seigneur, let me leave town today!

— And why is this?

— This morning, as I was crossing the square to come to the palace, a woman hit me in the crowd. I turned around and I recognized death... She looked hard at me. Sire, she is looking for me...

— Are you sure it was death?

— Yes, Sire, she was dressed in black with a red scarf. Her look was frightening. Believe me Sire, she is looking for me, let me leave right now, I shall take my fastest horse, and if I do not stop, I'll be able to be in Samarkand this evening!

The caliph, who loved his vizier, let him leave. The latter disappeared in a cloud of dust...

Wondering, the caliph left the palace in disguise, as he had often done. On the market place, he saw death and advanced toward her:

— I have a question to ask you: my vizier is a young and healthy man. Why did you terrorize him this morning giving him a threatening look?

— It was not a threatening look, it was an astonished look. I did not expect at all to see him here, in Baghdad... I have an appointment with him this evening, in Samarkand!

Baudrillard conceives destiny as the principle of reversibility in act. It is necessary to oppose *destination* (which has a clear purpose, what classical philosophies of history thought each one in its fashion, and preceding geographies), *predestination* (without religious connotation). Such moment of time is predestined to such other, “as in a poem where one has the impression that words have always had the vocation of meeting again.” All coincidences, he adds, are sort of predestinated.

Coincidence, and not “causal” necessity, which we run into here in Bakou, among old cultures (Donald H. Rumsfeld spoke of the “old world,” scornfully), which are at the same time ignored, and co-engendered by secular circulation (why not say millenary) of goods, ideas and men.

Latin pluralism is a plentiful (and fragile) multiplicity of destinies that belong to us to be left open. These the inexhaustible virtualities of *Unita multiplex*.

■ At last, we will call to mind the luminous idea of Bergson (of which Baudrillard has made a very “personal” usage as usual). In *The Possible and the Real* (retaken in *The Thought and the Changing*⁷), Bergson denounces a misunderstand-

ing, rather an error. The idea that the possible would be *less* than the real and that for this reason the possibility of things would precede their existence:

They would thus be representable in advance; they might not be thoughts before being accomplished. But it is the opposite that is true. (...) If we consider the whole of concrete reality or all simply the world of life, (...) we find that there is no more, and no less, in the possibility of each one of the successive states in their reality.

And farther to add:

I believe we will end up finding it evident that the artist created from the at the same time from the real when he executes his work.

This is very precisely one of the major features of this “destinal” Latinity: creating from the possible (political, geopolitical, cultural, indeed brotherly) at the same time as from the real.

Notes

1. *La Méditerranée et l'Europe*, Fayard, 2005 (Lessons given at the Collège de France in 1997).
2. *Europe, la voie romaine*, Gallimard, coll. Folio, 1999 (particularly, chapter II).
3. *L'étranger ou l'union dans la différence*, Seuil, 2005 (particularly, chapter III).
4. *La vitesse de libération*, Galilée, 1995.
5. *Qu'est-ce que le cosmopolitisme?* Aubier, 2006.
6. In an epigraph of his book *Qu'est-ce que le cosmopolitisme?*
7. *In Œuvres*, édition du Centenaire, Presse Universitaire de France, 1959, p. 1331, sq.