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For Erik Aren Schroeder

Chapter 15

The World and the West Today *The Problem of a Global Public Sphere*

GIACOMO MARRAMAO

Introduction

The world and the West. Not the West and the world. In its provoking inversion of the order of the terms, the hendiadys closely follows the title of a famous series of conferences: the Reich Lectures given by Arnold Toynbee in 1952 at the invitation of the British Broadcasting Company and published the following year by Oxford University Press (thus published before the conclusion of the monumental *Study of History*, which appeared in ten volumes between 1934 and 1954). Never, as in this case, has the inversion in the order of factors violated the mathematical axiom according to which the product remains unchanged. Here the inversion adumbrates a radical change in meaning and direction, such that it challenges the traditional optical summit that in the philosophy of history as well as in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century social sciences, assigned a privileged position to the West. Toynbee himself anticipates the foreseeable objection to the reversal of terms that he posits:

Why... has the book been called *The World and the West*? Is not the West just another name for as much of the world as has any importance for practical purposes today? And, if the author feels that he must say something about the non-Western rest of the world, why must he put the two words in this order? Why could he not write *The West and the World* instead of writing *The World and the West*? He might at least have put the West first.¹

The answer is so radical and sharp as to cast light on the interpretative viewpoint underlying the comparative approach to civilizations that is taken in such a vast and ambitious work, comparable in its kind only to that of

Fernand Braudel. We can drastically summarize such an interpretative viewpoint in three cardinal theses: First, not only has the West "never been all of the world that matters," but also it has not been "the only actor on the stage of modern history even at the peak of the West's power (and this peak has perhaps now already been passed)." Second, in the encounter between the world and the West that has been going on now for four or five centuries, the part that has had "the significant experience" has been up to now not the West but the Rest—the rest of the world. Third, in the "hit" [irrit] between the West and the Rest, it is not the West to have been hit by the world, but rather "it is the world that has been hit—and hit hard—by the West."²

Toynbee's theory of the "hit" confronts us with the long duration, with the historical-structural depth of that set of events today gathered under the ubiquitous headword "globalization": an intertwining of events that can be understood only by going to the roots of that "expansion of the West over the world"³ that, if it certainly has its turning point at the end of the fifteenth century with the opening up of the seas and the conquest of the New World, nevertheless finds a meaningful referent in the Greek and Roman history of the fourth century BCE with the advent of the Alexandrian empire. Alexander's march across Asia "made as revolutionary a change in the balance of power in the world as the voyages of De Gama and Columbus."⁴ It cannot be doubted that, by turning the earth into a circumnavigable sphere, the conquest of America marks the beginning of modern globalization; nevertheless, it is not less true that in the second century BCE, due to the conquest of India up to Bengal by the Greeks and of the Atlantic frontier represented by the Iberian peninsula and the British island by the Romans, the Western—that is, Greco-Roman—civilization of the time could boast of having penetrated, thanks to the radiation of its conquering culture, those that then appeared as the extreme edges of a planet whose shape and dimension had more or less been already calculated. The hit by the West had thus caused the world before the advent of Christianity "as sharp a shock as the impact of our modern Western culture has been giving it since the fifteenth century of our era."⁵

And yet, in the movement of the radiating center of Western technology and culture from the Greek and Roman hegemony to the hegemony of modern Europe (which cannot be understood, according to Toynbee, without that scientific revolution to whose incubation the Islamic civilization contributed fundamentally) and from Europe to the current U.S. supremacy and to the "extreme West" represented by the Pacific area, what changes is not only the idea of the West (with a paradoxical effect of "orientalization" of the once-dominating centers), but also the nature and the configuration of the "clash" between the West and the world. When one revisits it today, half a century later, Toynbee's comparative approach appears—although inevitably conditioned by the assets of the bipolar world—not only anticipatory of our present age in many aspects, but also a precious corrective to

many philosophical genealogies in their claims to reduce current global conflicts to a domination by the technology that is inscribed in the Greek matrix of the West since its origins. If one adopts such a reductionist scheme, one loses sight not only of the spurious genesis of "Western" culture out of the civilizations of the near and far "East," as the most accredited studies on "orientalism" have documented (let me just mention here Jean Bottero's *Mesopotamia*, which starts with an introduction aptly titled "The Birth of the West")⁶, one also loses sight of the totally Western character of the dualism "East/West," which goes back to the polarity Greek/barbarians introduced by Herodotus in the *incept* to his *Histories*. Furthermore, one loses sight not only of the sliding westward of that oppositional couple, so that, as a consequence of the identification of the West with the Franco-Germanic area, Greece has ended up being part of the "empire of the East," whereas today Europe is treated as an ambiguous and indecipherable entity by the West *par excellence* represented by the United States. More important, one also loses sight of the changes in the form and structure of the world that are subsequently produced by the various stages of the "hit."

It is only with the modern epoch, marked—to say it with Carlo Cipolla—by the lethal combination of the sailing ship with the cannon,⁷ that Western civilization deterritorializes itself by going around Asia's terrestrial empires via the sea. This turning point, however, in which technics becomes autonomous and gives rise to an unheard-of intertwining of industrial take-off, military power, and commercial expansion, is understood by Toynbee through the resort to a binary scheme entirely similar to those which he himself had otherwise sharply criticized. The hit between the world and the West caused by modern Europe's planetary expansionism would be nothing else than a *technological Westernization* imposing itself with the retaliation of a *spiritual de-Westernization*, "the present encounter between the world and the West is now moving off the technological plane on to the spiritual plane."⁸

Such an outcome—which seems to echo, albeit with rather different tones and modulations, a famous saying of the great "culture of the European crisis" in the twentieth century—depends, when carefully considered, on the presence of an unresolved tension running through the entire structure of the analysis. Despite the initial exhortation "to slip out of [one's] native Western skin and look at the encounter between the world and the West through the eyes of the great non-Western majority of mankind,"⁹ Toynbee is in truth incapable of taking leave of the prejudice underlying European comparative approaches and continues to consider Europe and the West as the center of *radiation* of global dynamics.

Today the theoretical perspectives opened up by cultural and postcolonial studies push European intellectuals and political elites to a courageous relativization of the role to which the modern concept of history had destined them in the course of the last two centuries. The provocative

invitation to "provincialize Europe," which was sent to the Western social sciences by a representative of subaltern studies such as Dipesh Chakrabarty,¹⁰ challenges not only the traditional "narratives" of philosophy of history, which postulated the Old Continent as the cradle of *humanitas* and the propelling center of universalizing dynamics, but also the comparative approaches, which under the assumption of European exceptionality turned Europe into the radiation point of a modernity destined to spread to the totality of the globe—a modernity in front of which any movement or trend for change coming from extra-European or non-Western areas is interpreted as a mere "reactive" manifestation to the expansionist processes of modernization.

Out of the just-delineated background, I will now try to offer a reading of the "hit wave" crossing the current global world that, on the one hand, is capable of capitalizing on the work of "deconstruction" and *location* of the European-Western civilization brought about by postcolonial studies, and on the other, is capable of addressing the problem of a possible *re-location* of the European region *after the disenchantment*. This chapter questions the (real or virtual) existence of a public global sphere, which is a more plausible (and analytically viable) question than the theses according to which there already exists, albeit in *nuce*, a "global civil society" (Ulrich Beck's *globale Zivilgesellschaft*, which would take the place of the classical *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and its Hegelian-Marxian flavor).

To ask such a question, however, implies a double operation: (1) to establish a critique of communication, and (2) to start with becoming aware of the existence in the globalized world of a plurality of "diasporic public spheres" (Arjun Appadurai),¹¹ which escape the territorial logic of the sovereignty of the nation-states as well as the way in which sociology has up to now understood, starting with Roland Robertson, the phenomenon of the *global* (or of *globalization*).¹²

The first operation is made accessible through some recent revisions of the optimistic prognosis of the global village made by the theoreticians of electronic multimedia. For them, rather than producing one sole sphere, the network has given rise to a multiplicity of centrifugal spheres. The second operation calls onto the scene the problematic relation between the two dimensions of the conflict of interests (or better, of the conflict of preferences, given the complexity, after the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of the notion of interest that is not at all reducible to the strictly economic-utilitarian environment) and the conflict of identities.

Such a relation, which can be summarized in the pair redistribution-recognition (which has been at the center in recent years of an interesting confrontation between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth), can be understood today only in light of a radical redefinition of the concept of public sphere as sharply marked out from the Rawlsian procedural as well as the Habermasian critical-communicative meaning. On the one hand, the political public sphere cannot be simply considered as the space of an overlapping consensus func-

tional to the negotiation of procedural rules of justice that put into bracket the conflict of the "overall conceptions" of the good. On the other hand, it cannot be understood either as a mere communicative exchange of rational value arguments functional to a wider and more inclusive *Verständigung*; rather, it must be understood as an encounter-confrontation of "narratives," which relate to the organization of the global society and come from different contexts of experience and life-worlds.

An additional complication arises from the circumstance that, because of their self-justifying and self-legitimizing potential (which is not inferior to that produced by the schemes of rational argumentation of values), narratives must be taken up in their contingency. From here comes a double exigency: (1) to overcome the notion of tolerance with that of reciprocal respect among identities and cultures (a "respect" that, on the one hand, takes into consideration Derrida's appeal to responsibility understood as a responding-to rather than a responding-of, that is, as an availability to be put into question by the other, and, on the other hand, does not exclude contamination, confrontation, and in the last analysis conflict itself); and (2) to subtract the category of recognition from the patronizing-supremacist as well as relativistic temptations.

Such an argumentative move implies first of all a sharp distinction between *cultural relativism* (the relevant acquisition and point of no return of the great anthropology of the twentieth century) and *ethical relativism*; and second, a dissociation of the notions—often mistaken or improperly assimilated—of *incommensurability* and *incomparability* between hierarchies of different values. Briefly, the fact that no unique parameter of commensurability exists among symbolic-cultural contexts (as Isaiah Berlin has taught) does not mean *eo ipso* that they are incomparable among themselves.

A public sphere built around such premises must abide the criterion of a *universalist politics of difference*, sharply marked out, on the one hand, from the universalist identity politics of the Enlightenment kind (which finds its noblest declination in Kant), and on the other hand from the antiuniversalist politics of differences (which are advanced in North America by the communarians and by some versions of multiculturalism, and in Europe by the "security oriented" ethnopolitics of various localisms and Lega-like movements [leghismi]).¹³ The thesis announced here is based on ten argumentative passages, through which I take up and develop the interpretative reading of the global world I have tried to propose in a recent work of mine, *Passaggio a Occidente. Filosofia e globalizzazione*.¹⁴

Global Age: Opportunities and Risks

The title of the book, *Passaggio a Occidente* [West Passage],¹⁵ carries the core of the thesis within itself. The heterogeneous set of phenomena we are accustomed to gather in the *passport* slogan "globalization" cannot be

understood in my opinion either in terms of universal homologation under "one thought alone" (Francis Fukuyama), that is, of the "Westernization of the world" (Serge Larouche),¹⁶ or in terms of the "clash of civilizations" (Samuel Huntington),¹⁷ but rather in terms of a West passage. "Passage" should be understood in the dual meaning of "journey" and "change," of "risk" and "opportunity." The process that, starting at the end of the 1980s, is occurring in front of our eyes is in the last analysis nothing else than an imperious *North-West passage* of all culture—a perilous transit toward modernity destined to produce deep transformations in the economies, societies, and lifestyles not only of the "others," but also of Western civilization itself. In the title is deposited the thesis that guides the multiple "circumnavigations" of the book. In a sense, it carries in *nuce* my philosophical thematization of that set of often "heterologous" phenomena, which is usually summarized in the German and Anglo-Saxon areas under the label "globalization" and in the cultural-linguistic romance area, common to neo-Latin countries, under the name "*mundialization*."

Postmodernity or World-Modernity [*modernità-mondo*]?

In what sense can one discern a difference in two lemmas usually employed as synonyms? "Mundialization" is a term loaded with the symbolic, even more than semantic implications of the Latin *mundus* in its inevitable reference to the idea of "mundanization," and thus of "secularization." Expressions such as "worldly" [*mondiale*] and "mundane" [*mondano*] contain an inevitable reference to the notion of *saeculum* and consequently to the field of tension between transcendence and immanence, heaven and earth. Globalization carries within itself rather the idea of the spatial completeness of such a process, the idea of a world that has become a finally circumnavigable globe—this is an idea, however, that has been declined in the most various and controversial manners. Many (Martin Albrow first of all) claim that globalization is a postmodern phenomenon, a new movie with a script *todo coelo* [entirely] different from all other movies seen so far. It is as if they were to tell us: the movie of modernity is over; now the global one starts. I do not share this position for the simple but decisive reason that in history stages and epochs do not follow one another giving rise to absolute ends or beginnings. As there are not movies that begin and movies that end, likewise one cannot say that up to a certain point (World War I? World War II? The fall of the Berlin wall?) there has been a modern space, whereas today an entirely new space that would be the global has started. I mean that between the two epochs or, if one prefers, between the two spatial orderings is neither an absolute threshold nor a longitudinal rupture. In sum, one must understand that in its genesis and structure, the global space is not conceivable if not as *consequence of modernity* (Anthony Giddens).¹⁸ Clearly maintaining such a claim does not amount to saying that there are not or cannot be break

points. It simply means that to grasp the actual aspects of novelty of the global space, we must consider it in close connection with the modern process of secularization. From its being endogenous, that is, internal to the developed Western countries of Judeo-Christian matrix, the dynamic of such a process has become exogenous to the point of affecting the most remote sociocultural realities and religious experiences. In this sense, rather than the advent of "the postmodern condition" (announced in a homonymous pamphlet by Jean-François Lyotard in 1979), globalization seems to mark a problematic and accident-paved transit from the nation-modernity [*modernità-nazione*] into the world-modernity.

Standardization and Differentiation

Avoiding the paradigmatic alternative according to which globalization is either total homologation or the clash of civilizations is necessary. I am convinced that standardization and differentiation are two sides of a same process—two lines of tendency that simultaneously integrate and refute each other. When observing things from this perspective, the opposed theses of Fukuyama (universal homologation under the sign of competitive individualism) and Huntington (the post-cold war world as the stage of a planetary intercultural conflict) appear not so much as drastic alternatives but rather as two half-truths. On the one hand, globalization is techno-economic and financial-mercantile standardization with the consequent phenomena of deterritorialization and increasing interdependency among the various areas of the planet; on the other hand, it is an equally accelerated trend of differentiation and reterritorialization of identities, of relocation of the processes of symbolic identification. Between the two aspects, which the sociological lexicon tends to summarize in the oxymoron of the *glocal*, there is an interfacial relation. At the same time, however, a dangerous short circuit may arise with paralyzing effects.

The Short Circuit of the "Glocal": A Philosophical-Political Reading

What is specifically the phenomenon of the short circuit? The short circuit is produced by the break of the intermediary link in the international modern order that arose out of the slaughter of the civil religious wars between Catholics and Protestants, which was sanctioned with the Peace of Westphalia in the mid-seventeenth century. This is the link represented by the nation-state and by the structure supporting it: the isomorphism between people, territory, and sovereignty. Here one should clarify once and for all the issue concerning the long seller on the "crisis of the state" that runs through all the great philosophical and juridical-political disputes from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century. The core of the controversy surrounding

themes such as the obsolescence of the nation-state, the erosion of sovereignty, and so forth, cannot be addressed only in a purely sociological site. This is so for the simple reason that the application of the quantitative methods of sociology would provide us with a result diametrically opposed to the diagnosis of the crisis of the state. If one were to analyze the health condition of the state from a numerical perspective and through an exclusive resort to the method of measuring, then the result today would be that of an excellent health because after 1989 the world has observed a real boom in the birth of national and subnational states (today, many more states are part of the United Nations than before the fall of the Berlin wall), and the instances and functions of the state have not at all shrunk but rather expanded. The decline of the state must be read then not in purely sociological and quantitative terms, but rather in political and qualitative terms—by focusing on the *efficaciousness* of the sovereignty of the individual states. The situation of the state within the global world thus returns to us the paradox of a “deadly health,” of a *decline while increasing*—of a degree of efficaciousness inversely proportional to the rate of quantitative expansion. The inexorable shrinking of the efficaciousness of territorial sovereign prerogatives determines the “break” in the intermediary function between global and local, a function that during modernity was carried out by the state. The “short circuit” arises because individual sovereign states are too small to confront the challenges of the global market and too big to control the proliferation of the themes, vindications, and conflicts various localisms induced. Hence derives that which in my book I name the “tongs” of globalization. On this issue also dissipating some equivocations is appropriate. Reading the hyphen in “global” as a mere disjunctive and not also conjunctive dash (thus following the interpretative key advanced by Zygmunt Bauman in his nevertheless meritorious essays)—as a simple border line between a cosmopolitanism of the rich, seen as the jet-set society indifferent to any border, and a localism of the poor, constrained and enclosed in their increasingly marginal and peripheral sites, would be too simple. If things were truly so, the global condition would be less paradoxical and in the end much more reassuring. What happens instead is the reverse: the paradox with which we have to deal today is a cosmopolitanism of the poor in front of a localism of the rich, so much so that the aptest tool for assessing the intensity level of localistic and autonomistic vindications would seem to be the “rich meter.” Otherwise, one cannot understand why devolution politics are more present in the rich regions of the planet (from Italian Northeast to the other wealthy regions in Europe, from the countries in Mercosur to those in Southeast Asia), whereas the demand for universalism comes from the poorest regions. This does not mean, however, that the poor are immune to that global virus, to that real “pandemic” I call identity obsession. I simply maintain that the drive toward the invention of a communitarian identity recognizable and characterized *per differentiam* in relation to all others—with the consequent fragmentation of

the global society into a plurality of “diasporic public spheres”—constitutes a reactive phenomenon: a mechanism of defense-reply to this globalization. This is a globalization that homologizes but does not universalize, compresses but does not unify. Thus, under the false appearance of the “politics of difference,” it produces a constant proliferation of logics of identity. All meaningful changes in human history have been preceded by great migratory events: by contaminations of cultures (and, obviously, also by allergic reactions to the increasing synergies). This is exactly what we observe happening today both in Western culture pitted with migratory processes and in other cultures that, although dominated by the figure of the nomad or the migrant, nevertheless long for a contamination with the West.

Redistribution/Recognition: Conflict of Interests and Conflict of Identities

At this point the question inevitably arises concerning the characters of the new dimension of the world-conflict [*conflicto-mondo*]. The nature of the global conflict certainly represents one of the settling issues in our current times. We are moving toward forms of conflict that are very different from the ones to which modernity had accustomed us. In the globalized world, the nature of the conflict is simultaneously postnational and transcultural: it exceeds the boundaries of the nation-state and crosses cultural and linguistic identities. With this I mean that in the globalized world not only cultures but also religions appear as subjects and referents of conflict. Religions, however, complicate and destabilize the geometrical linearity of Huntington's clash of civilizations. If carefully considered, the form of the global conflict appears much closer to the religious wars that preceded the birth of the modern secular states than to a clash of allegedly cultural monoliths. The fact that religions are an important moment in the global conflict appears to me as backlight evidence for the thesis that I have tried to delineate in my book and that I have had the opportunity to discuss, discovering meaningful convergences, with Marc Augé, a great anthropologist and extraordinary analyst of “cultural dynamics,” namely, that religions are by definition identity aggregations of a transcultural kind. The great religions never identify themselves with only one civilization. None of the “world religions” can be reduced to a monocultural dimension and latitude. This is certainly so for the Islamic religion, which we Westerners too often tend to identify with the Arab world, whereas it is a fault line that runs from Morocco to Indonesia and spans over very different historical traditions and cultural realities.

We have to take into account that this phenomenon, very often reduced to stereotypical expressions such as a “return of the sacred,” carries with itself a radical as well as silent change in the function of religion within the globalized world. We no longer have to do either with the “invisible religion,” which a false forecast has too hastily confined to the privacy of the

interior forum, or with a "religious" understood as surprising vitality of faith after the death of ideologies; rather, we have to do with religions (in the plural) as factors of symbolic identification and belonging. They are factors of identification and also, for the very same reason, of conflict. This conflict is certainly not reducible to the utilitarian model of rationality of modern individualism; yet, it cannot be understood either by resorting to the pure logic of interest or power. Having said this, one should not think that within such new conflicts the material and strategic component is not present. In any historical stage one can observe an inextricable intertwining of the two dimensions of "contract" and "conversion" (Alessandro Pizzorno), of "redistributive conflict" and "fight for recognition" (Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth), of interests and identity, of will to power and will to value. As the ethical and identity dimension was present even in the most industrialist and trade unionist class struggles, likewise the dimension of economic interest was far from absent from the religious wars between Catholics and Huguenots in France. Yet, the matter is that of identifying, time after time within the constant aspect of the intertwining, the "dominant feature" impressing its characteristic form to the conflict. In this sense, to characterize the nature of the global conflict, in *Passaggio a Occidente* I have thought that such a dominant feature could be identified in the identity moment. With this I have not at all meant to hypothesize a sort of "baton passing" from the industrialist dominance of the conflict of interests to the postindustrialist dominance of the identity conflict; rather, I have tried to stress how, in the current stage, the identity moment tends to encapsulate also the utilitarian moment within itself. In our world asking the classical question of modern individualism, "What do I want?" without previously asking, "Who am I?" seems to be increasingly difficult. The symbolic interrogation concerning identity thus appears as a *conditio sine qua non* to be able to identify one's own interests and scale of preferences.

Difference—Not Differences

What repercussions might all this have on the level of real politics? In my opinion, it has wide ranging repercussions on theory as well as on practice, on the conceptual constellation as well as on the actual reality of the "political." The new form of the conflict affects at its core the contractualist paradigm of political modernity, which finds its classic symbolic representation in the image of the Leviathan-State as macroconstruct or megamachine. Because of the "isometric" presupposition inherent in contractualism, the procedural techniques of the Leviathan-State (not only of the Hobbesian absolute Leviathan, but also of the democratic Leviathan a liberal such as Rawls theorized) is capable of ruling only conflicts of interest but *not*—and here is the crucial point—conflicts of identity through compensative measures of distributive justice.

To solve in a liberating way the prospectively catastrophic antagonism between the neutralizing universalism of the modern state and the identity fetishism of communitarianism and of certain variations of multiculturalism, I have advanced the proposal of a global public sphere marked by a universalist politics of "difference." I mean "difference" in the singular, not in the plural (the famous "cultural differences," about which all or almost all today speak). To explain it better, I understand "difference" not as particular place, subject, or condition, but rather as "optical summit" capable at the theoretical level of breaking with the distributive and "state-centered" paradigm of politics, and at the practical level of shattering the isometry of democratic institutions structurally incapable of handling the new forms of conflict. Far from being a third way between universalism and differences, liberalism and communitarianism—nineteenth-century cemeteries are paved with third ways, as is well known—my proposal aims at reconstructing the universal based not on the idea of a common denominator, but rather on the *criterion* of difference. The reconstructive principle of the universal therefore can be understood only in terms of a *disjunctive synthesis*—based on the presupposition of the inalienable and inappropriate particular difference of each. In my concept of the universal, the relation can be properly thought only as one between *irreducible* and *mutually insimilable singularities*. This is exactly at the antipodes of the conception of a social bond understood as a belonging to a common identity-substance (Community, State, but also Reason, Humankind, Language). By activating the criterion of difference, smashing another equation, that between incommensurability and incomparability of cultures, also becomes possible.

Incommensurability and Incomparability

Incommensurability and incomparability of cultures—other concepts that must be clarified better. Let us proceed with order. One of the most precious results of twentieth-century ethnology has been the acquisition of cultural relativism and the consequent disenchantment concerning the hegemonic and supremacist implications of Western universalism. To take seriously the "Copernican revolution" effected by great nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropology means, in brief, to take the rigorously contextual (and thus relative) character of cultures and the destitution of any a priori claim to universal validity for our values and lifestyles as the starting points of any analysis and political project. This is what we find to be already genially foreshadowed, within the climate of the religious world and the conquest of the New World, in that extraordinary *ouverture* to modern disenchantment represented by Montaigne's *Essais*: it is easy to say "cannibals." Any culture is a world, a constellation of symbols and values that need to be analyzed first of all *iuxta propria principia* [according to its own principles] without projecting our own cultural parameters on that symbolic universe. All this, I repeat,

is indisputable, and it is part of the great acquisitions of the century that lies behind us. Yet two aspects need to be considered, which I now introduce in an interrogative form. First, are we really sure that even, or perhaps precisely, when we revert the traditional supremacist and colonialist optics into the relativist one, up into the extreme of third world ideologies, we are not actually looking at the others "with Western eyes"? Second, who has said that the incommensurability of cultures—that is, the absence of only one standard of evaluation—should necessarily amount to their incomparability and incommensurability? On the contrary, cultural realities or *cosmoi* responding to different "metrics" are sometimes capable of giving rise to creative compositions that last longer than many allegedly homogeneous symbolic forms. At this point, however, one should address another issue, which I simply mention: one of the themes à l'ordre du jour is the need for a critique of the concept of culture understood as a close system and insular self-sufficiency, and the assumption of the idea of multiple identity as the only possible way of comparative access to the event of civilizations.

Public Sphere and Rhetoric: Between Argumentation and Narration

What has been said so far perhaps may be true theoretically speaking. Yet, in practice, how can we arrive at different compositions among incommensurable cultures?

As I mentioned, I do not believe a global civil society is being formed; in the present state of things, what is global is only the market-information mix and the name-brands with which we are constantly bombarded thanks to real time technologies. And I do not believe in a coming advent of the cosmopolitical republic, which Immanuel Kant predicted more than two centuries ago, or of the *civitas maxima* which a jurist such as Hans Kelsen postulated in the last century. Nevertheless, I am convinced that one can work, in a medium-term perspective, at a recomposition of the various "diasporic public spheres" (as they are called by Appadurai, a significant representative of *postcolonial studies*) within a global public sphere marked by the universalism of difference. Such a public sphere (which initially will have to develop from macroregional areas—starting from Europe, but this is only a wish) will not restrict the confrontation among the different groups' *Weltanschauungen*—among visions of life and world—to the negotiation of procedural rules according to the method of intersecting or overlapping consensus as contemplated by political liberalism. Neither shall it limit itself, however, to functioning, as Habermas postulated, as a ground for confrontation—geared to agreement—between argumentative models and schemes geared toward a justification of the different value options. Although it represents an undisputable progress in comparison with strictly procedural versions of democracy, such a proposal nevertheless has the inconvenience of

an explicit discrimination between subjects with and without communicative-argumentative competence. Yet, even those subjects who are strongly deficient as to the logic of rational-discursive argumentation can be capable of accounting for their ethical choices or for the consequences that the autonomous or heteronomous assumption of certain norms and lifestyles entails for their own existence.

The relational-communicative dimension put into being by the public sphere cannot be argumentative only; it must also be narrative. There may be subjects who, although not capable of producing an argumentative justification for their values, culture, and vision of the world, are nevertheless capable of narrating the experience of those very values that they make daily—an experience, in all evidence, which is not only rational but also emotive. An Islamic young woman living in Paris *banlieu*—to make the most obvious, but also dramatically closest example—may not be capable of arguing for her (more or less free) choice of wearing the veil, but not because of this she will be unable to narrate the *emotive-rational experience of the value* that such a decision entails and its existential implications. In the public sphere, the right of citizenship belongs neither to formal procedures of right (which are certainly essential and inalienable, because without them we could not call ourselves truly free) nor to the logic of argumentation alone. The space of the *Cosmopolis*, of the global city must—contravening Plato's interdiction—extend the rights of citizenship also to rhetoric, to the narration of oneself, to the experience of narrating voices. However, this does not authorize—and this must be emphasized strongly—accepting narrations without reservations. Nothing grants, in fact, that a narrative strategy may not have self-justifying and self-apologetic implications exactly like an argumentative strategy of an ideological kind. In the inevitable mix of reason and experience, argumentation and narration, which marks the relations among the different human groups within the "glocalized" world, a democratic public sphere can indeed accept rhetoric; but only, as Carlo Ginzburg has aptly remarked, on condition that it is a matter of *rhetorics with proofs*, not of rhetorics without proofs. This is the step to make if we want to leave behind us the ethnocentric version of universalism as well as the nihilistic drifts of that historical materialism that considers as an *a priori* the forms of self-understanding of each particular culture, thus rendering incommensurability a synonym of incomparability and incommensurability.

To face the "global risks" linked to the current interim between the no-longer of the old interstate order and the not-yet of the new transnational order that has difficulties delineating itself, there is only one way: to engage in a reconstruction of the pattern of Enlightenment universalism based on the *criterion*, the discriminating factor, and the optical summit of difference. In other words, the issue is that of delineating a universalist politics of difference by tracing a double line of demarcation: on the one hand, with respect to the universalist politics of identity, which has its noblest expression in Kant's

ethico-transcendental program; on the other, with respect to the antiuniversalist politics of differences, which in North America is carried out by the communarians and in Europe by the ethnopolitics of the various regionalisms and league-like movements. Of course, this is not a solution, but rather . . . a provisional morality. Yet, as I have tried to explain in my book, in this transitional stage of a "West passage," which is destined to last still a while, we will have to write with one hand "universality," and with the other "difference," and avoid the temptation to write them both with the same hand because in any event it would be the wrong hand.

East/West: A Specular Mythologema

East and West are increasingly often identified as the two extremes of what is now defined as a "clash of civilizations." Yet, going beyond the two specular myths of the East and the West is necessary. The fundamental contradiction of the global world is not given, as Huntington hypothesizes, by the clash of the West and Islam, but rather by the confrontation with the Asian giant. I do not mean by this to deny or downplay the extent of the danger represented by Islamic terrorism in the short to medium range, especially as long as that breeding ground of conflict that is the Palestinian question remains open. Just as fundamentalist tendencies are a sign of identity frustration, likewise terrorist exasperation is a symptom of powerlessness and not of strength within the Islamic world. Despite its atrocity, the global terror of September 11, 2001 (and March 11, 2004) is a desperate reaction against the process of modernization and secularization. It is a reaction the intensity of which is inversely proportional to the ability of the Muslim multiverse [multiverso] to configure a real global alternative to the West. Thanks to the ordinary relation with techniques inscribed in the genetic code of its civilization, and thanks to its ability to appropriate Western technologies and innovate them deeply, China instead is able to delineate the profile of another globalization by promoting a capitalist productive economy based not on individualist-competitive but rather on patronizing-communitarian grounds.

The fact that, in all probability, the twenty-first century will be marked by the challenge between two concurrent versions of the global—the American individualist version and the Asian communitarian one—based on the shared ground of accelerated technological productivity and innovation leads one to revise radically some famous diagnoses and prognoses Western science elaborated in the course of the last two centuries. I am referring especially to the substantially dismissive judgment of Confucian ethics uttered in the past in Max Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, which still today is the most important comparative picture of cultures. For Weber, Confucianism is a morality of obedience and adaptation to the world that is dysfunctional to the creation of a conduct of practical-active life, and thus of a productive and dynamic socioeconomic system. As I have tried to bring out in my book, the

optical distortion of Weber's forecast depends on the assumption of Puritan Protestantism's lifestyle—simultaneously ascetic and secularly oriented—as the prototype of capitalist ethics and, at the same time, as the parameter for the comparison between different "world religions." Weber's judgment of Confucianism is thus vitiated by the assumption of "inmundane asceticism" as the optimal way of realization for a productive society. The features that Weber identifies as passive, adaptive, and nonproductive within Confucianism are not by chance producing an alternative model of globalization, which—let me be clear—I am far from defending. We should not forget that the so-called Asian values advertised by the elites of China and the countries belonging to the macroregion of Southeast Asia call with no hesitations for the subordination of the individual to the state authority, the submission of the individual rights to the collective. However, underestimating the effectiveness of some aspects of that message—for example, the need to maintain harmony in the relation between generations—when compared to the marginalization of the elderly and the isolation of the individuals characterizing the "great cold" of our Western civilizations would be wrong.

Regardless, this is a challenge that cannot be faced if one does not critique the traditional stereotypes of the East created by our culture. As Karl Jaspers declares, the dualism "East-West" is a typical product of Western thinking and is unknown to Asian civilizations. (Is it by chance that it is a philosopher of the European crisis such as Jaspers who foreshadows the postcolonial criticism of binary schemes—civil/barbarian, colonizer/colonized, racism/antiracism—as forms of stigmatization of alterity that are functional, even in their specular reversals, to the continuation of the hierarchy?). At this point, however, for cultural (even before political) Europe to assume the radicalness of the criticism of Western dualisms and the logic of symmetrical oppositions implies an ineluctable consequence, which amounts to a permanent call to the assumption of responsibility in front of global challenges. It is the "call" to play finally the role of global player and delineate its original alternative both to (allegedly) "American" individualism and to (allegedly) "Asian" communitarianism. This implies, however, a work of rigorous deconstruction of the oppositional polarity "East-West" (with the resort to a differentiated analysis capable of identifying the existence of a plurality of "Easts" and "Wests," as Amartya Sen suggested), but it also implies the arduous task of redefining radically both terms of the pair—namely, individual and community—which are too often uncritically subsumed under the binary logic and arbitrarily ascribed to both poles.

Cosmopolis and Philosophy: Toward a Global *Dialékein*?

This is the last step in my argumentative path. Which role can be played today by philosophy in this time suspended between the no-longer of the old interstate order and the not-yet of the new transnational order? Projected on

the global scene, philosophy—understood not generally as way to wisdom or vision of the world, but strictly as form of questioning, Socratic knowledge, focused on dialectic and dialogue—is a sort of “business card” with which Europe (the first root of Western civilization) should soberly present itself to the other great cultures of the planet, and confront itself with their specific forms of knowledge, which are different from philosophic knowledge. Only in a general and metaphorical sense can we adopt expressions such as “Indian philosophy,” “Chinese philosophy,” “African philosophy,” and so forth. In the intercultural multiverse of the global, or better, of the glocal, philosophy finds itself stripped of its traditional claims to universality and thereby inevitably relativized. And yet despite the incommensurably wider space in which it is called to operate, philosophy today finds itself, within the globalized world, in a spiritual situation similar to the one in which it found itself at its beginnings with Socrates in the Athenian polis of the fifth century. It is in the need to open up a path, a method, a way of questioning capable of escaping the paralyzing alternative between the wise world visions of the first pre-Socratic thinkers (*sophoi*, not *philosophoi*, that is, wise, not lovers of wisdom) and the absolute relativism of great sophistry. To renew “the Socratic moment” today, within this Kakania or global Babel, means to escape the jaws, on the one hand, of the normative claims of the great cosmologists and bioscientists, and, on the other hand, the false disenchantment on truth and universality proclaimed by the postmodernists’ hyperrelativist *bricolage*.

To play today the Socratic game of *dialogein*, of the dialectical confrontation of viewpoints, is even harder when we think that the addressees and interlocutors of such a game are no longer the Athenian citizens, but rather the nomads and migrants who have come to Cosmopolis from the most various regions, languages, and traditions. Yet it is perhaps more worth today than yesterday to bet on philosophy as on a relational practice that employs the *medium* of language to exercise a displacing, dislocating look on our daily realities. This is a dialogical practice of confrontation-conflict that, by operating in a space made of variable geometries and in a multiverse of dissonances, helps us to see that which we all have in front of our eyes, but which we are not capable of observing from a different perspectival angle, that is, from an angle capable of disclosing to us a new horizon of things, thus liberating us from the unbearable feeling of being caught in a one way or on an externally premarked path. Only under this condition will the Europe of philosophy (and thus, of right and politics) be able to posit itself as relational and dynamic polarity for a culture of *global constitutionalism* capable of opening welcoming spaces for a multitude of “unexpected guests.” Only thus, thanks to a paradoxical inversion in the path of modern philosophy of history, will Europe, through the identity paradox that wants it made of irreducible and inassimilable differences, emerge in a not-too-distant future as the *future of America*.

The new universal of the planetary public sphere we are called to build either will be the result of a relational maieutics, of a real *experimentum* of reciprocal “translation” among different experiences and cultures, or, simply, it will not be.

Notes

1. Arnold Toynbee, *The World and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
6. Jean Bottero, *Mesopotamia*, trans. Z. Bahrani and M. Van De Mieroop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).
7. See Carlo Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).
8. Toynbee, *The World and the West*, p. 16.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
10. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
11. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
12. See, for example, Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, ed. M. Featherstone, S. Lash, and R. Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 25–44.
13. Trans. note: The reference is to the Lega Nord, the Northern League, a right-wing movement and party which advocates, among other items, the separation and separatism of Italy’s northern regions from the center and the south of Italy.
14. See Giacomo Marramao, *Passaggio a Occidente. Filosofia e globalizzazione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003); English translation forthcoming (London: Verso).
15. Trans. note: The title of the book evokes the 1940 film *Northwest Passage*.
16. Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
17. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).
18. See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).