

UNIVERSAL HISTORY AND POSTMODERNISM

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The title of this essay already raises many controversial issues. Its formulation stands as a paradox. It contains a danger and a trap. The danger lies in the very term «postmodernism», on the meaning of which there is very little agreement. The trap is connected with the term «universal history», which might be identified with such suspect notions as «metanarrative», system, and totality— notions associated with power, oppression, and totalitarian ways of exercising control. I will specify what I mean by postmodernism shortly, but first I want to distinguish among the terms «universal history», «world history», and «global history».

Each of these terms has its own «referent» and posits a different object of study—*universum* (the whole of things, implying, however, the notion of universal order («cosmos» in opposition to chaos); the «world» (the domain of human culture as against the «earth» — considered as the «mother and origin» of «nature»); and the «globe» (primarily a material and spatial concept — earth situated in cosmic space). Thus, to write a universal history today would mean to attempt an all-embracing vision of the cosmos, in which the history of the Earth would constitute only one chapter. A world history would be a story about the past of human culture in the perspective of a *longue durée*; and global history would concern contemporary history and the XX century as the beginning of the new era — a global age, written from the perspective of the future.

Which of the above mentioned approaches would be the most useful? What would be the desired point of reference for such a synthesis and what might be the «central subject» of such a history? Would it refer to the entire cosmos? Would it include the entire solar system, or only the Earth? Who or what human groups (and if only human groups) belong to this history? The most difficult question, however, is if (and how) it is possible to construct any kind of history at all from a «postmodernist perspective» or rather perspectives¹?

Postmodernism is generally thought to be anti-historical in principle. History or historical consciousness is one of the «prejudices» that postmodernism claims to dissolve. Writing on universal/world/global history from the perspective of postmodernism would therefore be paradoxical. How could one possibly construct a metanarrative in a postmodern climate that favours microstories, the fragment, non-linearity, decentralization and multiperspectives? On the other hand, after the

¹ See: Bruce Mazlish, «Global History in a Postmodernist Era?», in *Conceptualizing Global History*. Edited by Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 113-127.

postmodernist critique of the categories and concepts of Western historical thinking, only heightens the sense that we lack any grid or frame that could bring an order to our mosaic-like and kaleidoscopic life and endow it with meaning and hope. Perhaps, then, as Fredric Jameson has argued, postmodernism teaches us the necessity of some kind of master narrative. The unification of humanity in a single enterprise of self-realization is impossible without it².

To be sure, all «universal/world/global histories», are «philosophies of history», which implies that they may be considered as prophecies or predictions of the future rather than perspectives on the past. But, as Collingwood noted, they are forecasts, less of the future of history than of «the lines which historical inquiry [might] follow in the next generations»³. In my essay I am going to follow this double track.

I

Every day we see more and more symptoms of a profound change in the human condition and in our world-view. We are witnessing what Fredric Jameson calls «the emergence of a global, multinational culture which is decentered and cannot be visualized, a culture in which one cannot position oneself»⁴. We do not know this culture, we are not familiar with it. What happens is that most of the categories that we have been using till now to describe the world and our experience of it simply do not work any more. In addition, not only do we have no proper categories, but also no proper language to describe it. It does not seem profitable, however, to use the language and categories of any given postmodernism to conceptualize this emergent global, multinational world, because postmodernism is itself a product of the confusion and disorientation resulting from the recognition of the limits of representation of the world by means of abstract categories and their incapacity to grasp the «new». What happened is that during the last centuries, the experience of the world has been replaced by an *Ersatz* abstract knowledge, which is in itself nothing more than a phantasm. Jean Baudrillard grasped the essence of this process when he called our era «the age of simulacra and simulation» in which a human being lives in an artificial reality created by the media. This is the world where signs of the real have been substituted for the real itself, where all referentials have been liquidated, and where an imaginary Disneyland has more real presence than a hyperreal Los Angeles⁵.

Many scholars say that the modern epoch already belongs to the past and that the 1990s are marked by a belief that we are entering an entirely new epoch which needs a theory of the new beginning. For historians interested in writing a synthesis adequate to the new era, it seems desirable to cease writing about the past as a story concerning only human beings, recognizing that the idea of scientific history was only an episode in the modernist ideology, and also rethinking the idea of culture itself, since the notion of culture is considered as one of the most powerful abstractions of the modernist project. At the same time, the era of globalization is characterized by a shift of the social center of gravity from abstracts to «materia», from intellectual knowledge to sensual knowledge, from cognition to experience, from historical thinking to mythical thinking⁶.

Thus, to talk about the problem of universal/world/global history from a perspective of a postmodernist critique would be to march in place without moving ahead. Considered as a radical form of modernism, and not its opposition, postmodernism undermines the categories which are basic for our understanding of history: the idea that history can be a scientific discipline, the ideology of progress, and the traditional notions of realistic representation, linear development, and cause-and-effect linking of events. Moreover, we cannot catapult ourselves out of a way of thinking that is basically modernist in its essence. We are all modernists. So, is it possible to write an all-embracing synthesis for the New Era? Any historian who would accept this challenge should be a prophet. Besides, perhaps the New Era does not need history as a specific approach to the past. Would, then, myth be better?

That is why I think that it would be more productive for my purpose here to give up an attempt to summarize «what Postmodernism did to history», and to take a speculative approach rather than a critical one. Thus, I propose to analyze the problem of writing the syncretical stories of the history of the world and postmodernism from the point of view of speculative philosophy of history. (Is it true that history without speculation is dead?) I think that it is not enough to endorse the multiplication of perspectives, even though this is a necessary condition for living in a multicultural society, and to try to construct a kind of cross-cultural narrative of world history. It is not enough to say that since we have finally let the «Other» speak, we should write a history from the standpoint of any given «Other»⁷. It is also not enough to say that we are witnesses to a process of the textualization of history, that history itself is a text and that we can conceive of it in all the ways that we construe a text.

² See: Anders Stephanson, «Regarding Postmodernism. A Conversation with Fredric Jameson», in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*. Edited by Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 22-23.

³ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 454.

⁴ Anders Stephanson, «Regarding Postmodernism», 7.

⁵ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*. Transl. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

⁶ See Martin Albrow, *The Global Age. State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. Edited by Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990); *Modernity and its Futures*. Edited by Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁷ On the difficulties of writing and periodizing world history see Jerry H. Bentley, «Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History» and Patrick Manning, «The Problem of Interactions in World History», *American Historical Review* 101, no 3 (1996), 749-770 and 771-782.

II

We might say that there are at least two Postmodernisms: Postmodernism #1 (postmodernity), understood in a wide sense as the epoch which began around 1875 and follows upon the so-called «Modern» period of Western history which began with the Renaissance⁸. Contrary to this notion, we may posit as Postmodernism #2 that specific form of cultural critique that appeared in the Western academic world around 1975 and has been manifested in such fields as semiology, textual studies, radical feminism, gender studies, post-colonial studies, deconstruction and post-Marxism⁹. Consequently, when we seek to assess the value of «Postmodernism», we must keep the distinction between these two varieties of it in mind. Postmodernism #1 is less a program than a cultural condition, a condition which generates a distinctive set of questions and problems characteristic of a period of transition. Postmodernism #2 is more of an academic and artistic program, which can be seen as one specific response to the travails of this transition¹⁰. Thus, it is possible to say that [when reflecting changes in the late XIX and XX century culture], Postmodernism #2 signaled a fundamental change

⁸ Arnold J. Toynbee was one of the first to use the term «post-modern». In his *A Study of History*, Toynbee wrote: «There is an ample reason for supposing that we have recently passed into a new chapter [of history] whose beginnings may be placed round about 1875». This new «chapter»—he stressed—belonged to Western history only, not to world history. Thus, the «post-Modern age» was a Western phenomenon. Just as the term «Renaissance» is intended to serve as a figure for a period of «rebirth» and the term «Enlightenment» is a figure for a period of «illumination», in Toynbee's usage, «postmodern» is a figure for a time of breakdown and disintegration. It names a modernist equivalent of the «time of troubles», that phase which every society must pass through successfully or face the prospect of total collapse and disintegration. Among the dominant attributes of our postmodernist «time of troubles», Toynbee listed a collapse of the rationalistic world-view and the fading of belief in Cartesian reason. In social terms, postmodernism signaled the end of middle class dominance and passage to a society of the masses, mass culture, mass education, and mass movements. See Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History. Abridgement of volumes I-VI by D. C. Somervell* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 39.

⁹ See Linda Hutcheon's remarks on the confusion in the usage of the terms postmodernism and postmodernity in her *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 1-29. See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernism. An Enquiry into the Origin of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 39; Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations* (London: Macmillan, 1991); N. Carrol, «Periodizing Postmodernism?», *Clio* 26, no 2 (1997), 143-165.

¹⁰ However, according to some scholars, this Postmodernism has been in decline since about 1985. Others claim that among anthropologists for example, it is already pass. There is evidence that in other fields also this Postmodernism is passing from the scene. Cf. Walter Laqueur, «Fin-de-siècle: Once More with Feeling», *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no 1 (1996), 30. Compare also: Bruce M. Knauft, «Pushing Anthropology Past and Posts: Critical Notes on Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Studies as Influenced by Postmodernism and Existentialism», *Critique of Anthropology* 14, no 2 (1994), 125; A. Bernard Knapp, «Archeology Without Gravity: Postmodernism and the Past», *Journal of Archeological Method and Theory* 3, no 2 (1996), 127-158.

in thinking and perceiving the world undermined the obligatory methods of its comprehension.

I would like to focus on Postmodernism #1 understood in a wider sense, as a transitional period which is characterized by an attempt to construct on the ruins of modern thought, a new worldview supportive of a new way of being human. It is a manifestation of a desire for a new relationship between humanity and the earth different from the rationalistic-scientific world view that predominated since the Renaissance¹¹. Understood in this way, Postmodernism #1 could be considered a positive phenomenon. It is ground-clearing, and also contains the seeds of a new consciousness that we can see appearing on the horizon. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to mention here a concept of *palingenesis* — the process of beginning again, of a new genesis, especially when if we consider the Postmodern period as a *kairos*, «the right time», a special moment in world history for making decisions that will be crucial for the future¹².

III

For my purpose it seems enough to note that for the first time in history the forces which determine events that count in our time are global. Thus a key concept here is the words «globality» and «globalization». Following Martin Albrow, I assume that the globe is not a universal ideal, but a material reference point, a new level of organization of social and economic reality. Thus, «globality» is not a theory, but it is our everyday experience of the reality of the end of the second millennium. Let me mention only a few of its aspects:

1. a system of global communication (internet and satellite TV); TV gives us the possibility of daily experiencing world history on a grand scale. Thanks to this invention we have also a global forum, a possibility of discussing problems by internet but also a possibility of experiencing important events simultaneously (opening of the Olympic games in Nagano, the Persian Gulf War). Global communication instruments produce a global popular culture together with a global market, global warfare, and global «reality»;

2. the problems of the «third space»—cyber-space and «simulacrization» (Vattimo), virtual reality;

3. emerging of the global community; social transformations supported by communication and transportation; movements, migrations; changes in gender relations; turn from the internationality to globality in the foreign affairs;

¹¹ See David Ray Griffin, «Postmodern Spirituality and Society», *Dialogue and Humanism*, 1, no 2 (1991), 22.

¹² For example Toynbee who wrote on «palingenesis» in the sense of a birth of a new species of society. See his *A Study of History*, 588 and 368-370. More about *kairos* in Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* (New York-London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 123-175. See also Arthur McCalla, «Palingénésie philosophique to Palingénésie sociale: From a Scientific Ideology to a Historical Ideology», *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no 3 (1994).

nationalism versus globalism (an identification with people that share similar world-view without taking into consideration their sex, age, religion, race, culture, nationality or ethnicity);

4. experiments in genetics and medical technology: cloning, morphing with computers (cyborg);

5. environmental degradation; global atmosphere change (global warming, air pollution etc);

6. pandemic disease (AIDS);

7. population growth;

8. global economy: global production, global market, global trade, global business etc.

This brief though comprehensive list could indeed support a belief that modern societies are undergoing a crisis as acute as the transition from the culture of hunting and gathering to that of agriculture and machine industry¹³. But what does it mean for scholars who are interested in writing world history or in debating the ways it can be written? First of all, in order to change the way we write about the past, we must change the way we think about the past. Visible changes in the way of writing are caused by changes in consciousness, otherwise there are only «stylistic transformations», superficial tricks, changes in the rhetoric of representation¹⁴.

Fredric Jameson has recently came up with an interesting idea of achieving a new sense of the past. «I would [...] argue», writes Jameson, «that something like science fiction can occasionally be looked at as a way of breaking through to history in a new way; achieving a distinctive historical consciousness by way of the future rather than the past; and becoming conscious of our present as the past of some unexpected future»¹⁵. Hence, I would like to continue my presentation by sketching out some tendencies in current debates that ought to be understood as symptoms of new ways of thinking which are alternative to modernist thought and which may become dominant in the future. Thus, I would consider the attempts of new approaches of the writing of universal/world/global history from the perspective of the future. Certainly, I am not able to propose solutions to the problems I am going to talk about, but I am rather interested in finding a way of approaching these problems.

1. An alternative to history visions of the past

First, if one takes the above remarks seriously, one should take into consideration the fact that history is only one – and a distinctively Western – way

¹³ This view expressed some time ago by thinkers from different fields like Mircea Eliade, Alvin Toffler, Octavio Paz, has been recently announced by a historian-William H. McNeill—who wrote: «I suspect that human affairs are trembling on the verge of a far-reaching transformation, analogous to what happened when agriculture emerged out of broad-spectrum gathering», William H. McNeill, «The Changing Shape of World History», *History and Theory* 34 (1995), 25.

¹⁴ See Hayden White, «Rhetoric and History», *Theories of History*. Papers read at a Clark Library Seminar, March 6, 1976 by Hayden White and Frank E. Manuel (Los Angeles, 1978), 7-13.

¹⁵ Anders Stephanson, «Regarding Postmodernism», p. 18.

of dealing with the past. As we all know, other cultures have different ways of constructing the past, such as myth, legend, and the epic. So, the real challenge for world-historians at present would be not only to multiply cross-cultural alternative histories but to construct an alternative to history. I doubt that it is possible to write a world/universal history which would allow us to take into account all those «Others» who were silenced before. In fact, most of those abandoned by history, do not have history as we understand it; they have other ways of constructing and construing the past. To try to write their and to take into consideration their point of view, means to insert them into «our» history anyway. Thus, the real challenge is to envision a relation to the past that would combine different approaches: myth, legend, the epic, and history.

An Indian historian, Ashis Nandy remarks that historians tend to historicize everything, but never the idea of history itself nor that of historians themselves. Indeed, she continues, historians are so obsessed with the «idea» of history that they do not want to consider other visions of the past as serious alternatives to it¹⁶. The historical world-view is now so triumphant that «history» is indistinguishable from «the past». Therefore, it seems that for the globalized «new world», history may not give the best insight into the past.

2. Community of humans and nonhumans; «Pasteur as an event in the history of yeast»; history of mankind as a supplement to natural history rather than an opposite

The second challenge to modernist thought about a world history seems to be even more controversial. The idea of universal history originated in the Hellenistic age, but already in the fifth century B. C. the Greeks were conscious of a difference between the human world (*oikoumene*) and the natural world (*physis*) and «order» (*kosmos*) as against chaos (*kaos*)¹⁷. The history of the world or universal history was supposed to be a history of human world only – a history of how man had come to be what he has become. Generally speaking, universal history has always been the history of progress from «the caveman to superman», from «barbarism to civilization», from «stupidity to wisdom and genius»¹⁸.

Consequently, we have a clear dualistic division of reality: nature/culture. Moreover, following Hegel, historians came to take for granted that «there is no history except the history of human life» and that «nature has no history»¹⁹. In this way we have two different stories: one, a natural history of the earth and the other, a cultural history of the human world.

¹⁶ Ashis Nandy, «History's Forgotten Doubles», *History and Theory* 34 (1995), 44-54.

¹⁷ Raoul Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History From Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* [1950] (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 7.

¹⁹ See Collingwood's remarks on the problem of writing universal history by German philosophers. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 103-115, 433.

The distinction between earth and world has been profitably developed by Martin Heidegger. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger claims that «World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth and earth juts through world. [...] Earth cannot dispense with the openness of the world. [...] The world [...] cannot soar out of the earth's sight»²⁰. Following Heidegger's approach, it would be perhaps interesting to consider «universal history» as a story of the relations between earth and world. Seeing the relations between them in terms of encounter, conflict, and interaction rather than in terms of opposition, would generate new categories of thinking about «universal history».

This is suggested by Bruno Latour in an essay «Do Scientific Objects Have a History?». Latour points out that scientists typically study natural entities only from a human perspective. Moreover, modern science presupposes that its non-human objects of study are passive and do not actively intervene in the interpretations that scientists construct about them. Latour proposes that we conceive of history as «the collective [story] of humans and nonhumans». As an example he gives accounts by historians of science of Pasteur's discovery of lactic-acid fermentation caused by a specific bacterium. Why not, he asks, view Pasteur's discovery less as a product of his activity than as a manifestation of the yeast to human investigators? In other words, view nature as an active rather than as a passive process. «We must [...] explore this path», writes Latour, «however bizarre it may appear, and speak of Pasteur as an *event that occurs to lactic acid*»²¹. It is not if Latour is humanizing lactic acid. He is suggesting the limitations of the idea that the nature is passive and implying the idea that «earth» may be as active as «world» (which is culture). In Latour's article, nature shares with society the same historicity.

I do not want to suggest any return to vitalism. Heidegger's notion of the relationship between earth and world combined with Latour's idea of a nonhuman nature within history can give an interesting insight into the problem of global history as a process of «becoming» rather than «being». However, by the term «becoming» I do not mean that the present is a culmination of the past. Such an approach would be only a repetition of next stereotypes characteristic for modernist historical thinking. «Becoming» means a sequence of moments in which each stands as a potential *kairos*, an open possibility, the time of choice, a minute of encounter between man and the world, earth and cosmos.

In an essay «Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View», Kant asks us to consider the history of mankind as a supplement to natural history, rather than as its opposite. Individuals follow their own purposes, unconsciously fulfilling a natural goal which, however, remains unknown to

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, «The Origin of the Work of Art» (1936), in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 49.

²¹ Bruno Latour, «Do Scientific Objects Have a History? Pasteur and Whitehead in a Bath of Lactic Acids», translated by Lydia Davis, *Common Knowledge* 5, no 1 (1996), 82.

everyone. Thus, for Kant «the history of mankind can be seen [...] as the realization of Nature's secret plan»²² which implies that a process of «becoming» is a result of mutual relations, interactions, and encounters which take place between earth and world, humans and nonhumans. Each aspect of this process interferes with every other. Each is a supplement to another. They might be in conflict, but cannot be separated. The task of global history would be to demonstrate this process of «becoming».

3. The problematization of what historians take for granted; new challenges: spatialization of history; metaphorical thinking.

A third challenge to modernist thought about a world history is connected with the problematization of what historians usually take for granted, that is, the basic categories of historical thinking. Historians take for granted that time is linear, moving in one direction; that it is uniformly present throughout the universe (even if variously perceived); and that it is governed by a cause-effect order. During the last couple of decades however, there have been many attempts to rethink the problem of time in history. This is certainly not a new idea, since at the beginning of the twentieth century many thinkers (Toynbee, Spengler, Berdyaev, Schubart) rejected linear notions of progress or introduced interesting ideas of time in historical research (Braudel). More recent debates have originated in works by Michel Foucault, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, and feminist scholars (Julia Kristeva), who foreground ruptures, gaps, discontinuities, rhythmic time, and even gendering of historical time²³.

Very interesting ideas come from a thesis that at present history is more about places than about time. Inspirations for such a view might be found in Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. For Lefebvre, space is a key to the understanding of past history and the principal determinant of the present historical epoch. According to Lefebvre, space is more important than time, because it is space that determines time's rhythm and periodicity. However, by space he means a territory of social practice; this is a social space produced by human groups in their everyday life activities. Instead of arranging history in chronologically ordered sequences of time, the French historian and philosopher proposes to see it as different kinds of socially organized space²⁴. The

²² Immanuel Kant, «Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View», in Kant, *On History*. Edited, with an introduction of Lewis White Beck (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1967), 21. See also: Peter D. Fensves, *A Peculiar Fate. Metaphysics and World-History in Kant* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

²³ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Transl. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Julia Kristeva, «Women's Time». Transl. by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in: *The Kristeva Reader*. Edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 188-213.

²⁴ Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK;

«spatialization of history» and a «new logic of difference» have also preoccupied Fredric Jameson and informed his thoughts about Postmodernism as «the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism». For Jameson, history becomes spatialized with «globalization» and the disparity between global causation and local effects redefines the nature of cause-effect relations in global space.

The most difficult concept to deal with, however, seems to be that of cause-and-effect thinking. There have been some attempts to introduce an alternative to this model of historical relationship, such as metaphorical thinking. A growing interest in metaphorical thinking is connected with a rediscovery of the cognitive value of metaphor. Since metaphors involve seeing one thing in terms of another, knowledge that is constructed by way of metaphorical thinking permits between apparently unrelated phenomena and illuminates different aspects of «reality». This interest in metaphor in turn, is connected with a new interest in the value of images in the representation of history as a supplement (or as an alternative) to written history. It is no accident that so many philosophers are now speaking about a post-literate world that will be perceived not through written texts but through images. This idea would not be so shocking if we remembered that a similar transformation has already happened in the past – when we passed from an oral to a written form of communication. Thus, we might think that just as myth was adequate for tribes, historical tales for ancient communities, and written history for nations, it is perhaps film (not to speak of «virtual history») that will be the best way of dealing with the past in the future²⁵.

All those tendencies to reconceptualize the basic stereotypes of historical thinking are manifested in practice in the special issue of *Life* magazine (Fall 1997), where the categories of modern historical thinking are broken. Here the history of the world is presented in the form of fragments, as a kind of mosaic, and is based on epoch-making events chosen at random that are presented in the form of short stories accompanied by images that relate to the texts by analogies built on metaphors. Events are not presented in a chronological order. There is no central plot. All the stories and images suggest far reaching effects of the events presented. This attempt however, remains still within the framework of the post-modern epoch and modernist thinking.

IV

Certainly I am not able to write «a third-millennium global history». No one is able to do so at present, since we are all moderns living in a post-modern world. Such a new approach requires a fundamental change of consciousness. This is a

Mabridge, USA: Blackwell, 1991). See also: Hayden White's review in *Design Book Review*, 29/30 (Summer/Fall 1993), 90-93.

²⁵ Cf. Robert Rosenstone's interesting ideas about «visionary history» in his book: *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 43.

problem of generational change. Thus, the important question would be to whom would we want to address a global history? Generally, universal histories appeal less to professional historians than to students and to the general reading public. This was certainly true with respect to Toynbee, Spengler, etc. But «reality isn't what it used to be». Our world and the world of our children is different.

Young people growing up in the climate of globality and the next generation of citizens of a planetary culture will have a different kind of consciousness from us, a different world-view, different concepts of time and space, different notions of determination. Hence, considering the way global history should be written, we should look to the needs and expectations of future generations. For us – moderns – the most important are the attempts to change our ways of thinking about the past and eventually our own attempts of stimulating such changes.

Natalie Zemon Davis in her essay «Beyond Evolution: Comparative History and its Goals» pointed out, that in the last years, historians considering various ways of analysing other cultures have been speaking about «encounters» rather than «comparisons»²⁶. Referring the category of encounter to the present experience of the «Other», it might be said that in the kairoic moment and in the kairoic place of encounter between people of different ages, sex, religion, culture and ethnicity, a new world is born. It might mean that relations become more important than scientific strategies of research. This conference shows that there is the need for people not only to become more multi-cultural, but also to become multi-epistemological; that there is the need for encounters – encounters between different cultures, and between different individuals. But how can we recognize this *kairos*? History does not help us here, since what we learn from history is that in fact we do not learn from history. And this is why, probably the most difficult challenge to the modernist historical thinking would be to give up an idea that the knowledge about the past can help us to understand the world and solve the problems of the present.

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²⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, «Beyond Evolution: Comparative History and its Goals», in *Swiat historii* [The World of History], edited by Wojciech Wrzosek (Poznan: IH UAM, 1998), 154.