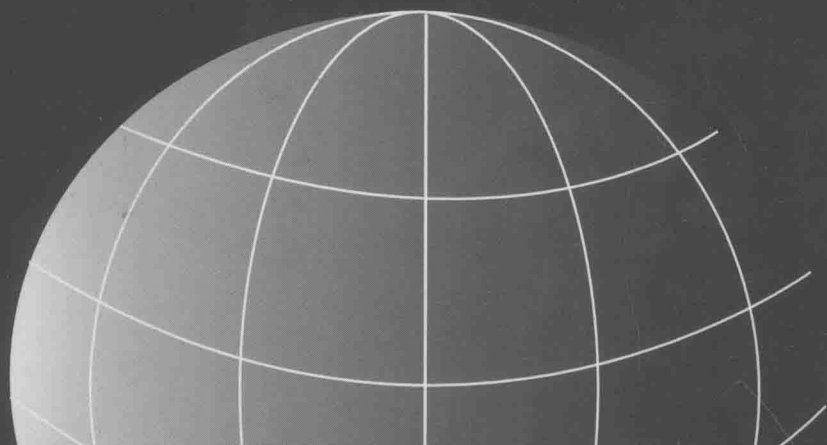


Gitta Tulea
editors

Starting the Twenty-First Century

Sociological Reflections & Challenges



Ernest Krausz
Gitta Tulea
editors

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Transaction Publishers
New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 2001041455

ISBN: 0-7658-0098-5 (cloth); 0-7658-0948-6 (paper)

Printed in Canada

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Starting the twenty-first century : sociological reflections and challenges / Ernest Krausz and Gitta Tulea, editors.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7658-0098-5 (cloth: alk. paper)—ISBN 0-7658-0948-6 (paper : alk. paper)

1. Social values. 2. Social problems. 3. Social planning. 4. Jews—Identity. 5. Jewish diaspora. I. Krausz, Ernest. II. Tulea, Gitta.

HM681 .S73 2001

306'.09—dc21

2001041455

Preface

The rationale behind this volume is twofold: its purpose is both to look at some of the major changes—indeed upheavals—of the twentieth century, as well as to provide some insights into the likely future trends as we enter the new millennium. We were fortunate to have been able to enlist prominent social scientists from a number of countries to contribute papers to our volume. Their papers attest to the diversity of subjects and views within the wide framework of twentieth-century events and challenges with implications for the future.

The papers deal with a number of distinct areas and problems that we see as falling into four sections: structural and cultural changes in the postmodern world; contemporary social development; transitional changes in Eastern Europe; and particular aspects of the Jewish world, including Israel. The papers are presented in each section in the alphabetical order of authors' names.

As editors we must stress that the opinions expressed in the papers are entirely those of the authors. We are grateful to the authors for their valuable contributions and for taking an interest in our special volume of *Sociological Papers 2000*.

We thank the Sociological Institute for Community Studies for enabling us to produce this volume and the Leon Tamman Foundation for their support. In processing and editing this volume we were greatly helped by Dr. Esther Guggenheimer-Furman, for which we owe her much thanks. We also wish to thank Susie Grossman and Sara Nussbaum, members of the Institute staff, for their constant help in preparing this volume.

We wish to note that the paper by Professor S.N. Eisenstadt was first published in the Simon Wisenthal (Hrsg.) Project Judenplatz Wien, Zsolnay 2000; a longer version of the paper by Professor Michael M. Cernea appeared as The 1995 Malinowski Award Lecture, The World Bank, Washington, D.C. 1996; and the paper by

Dr. Regine Azria was published originally in French by Christoph Miething in *Politik und Religion im Judentum*, Romania Judaica, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen 1999. To all the above we are grateful for granting us permission to publish their papers in our volume.

The Editors

Introduction

Postmodernism and *The Cunning of Reason*

Gitta Tulea and Ernest Krausz

There are moments in social history, and consequently, in the development of social thought when events and ideas seem destabilized. In spite of its huge technological, informational, and knowledge achievements, postmodern society at the end of the century was confronted with facts and problems that were completely unpredictable, and the actual basic patterns of explanation furnished by sociological thought are still unable to furnish a meaningful explanation for these events and their future course.

Not that sociologists are not aware of the fundamental changes that accompanied the emergence of postmodern society. The tragic collapse of the industrial civilization into fascist and totalitarian regimes and their unexpected association with producing the most brutal and terrible events of the twentieth century created a challenge for social thought at the end of the century. The burgeoning and constant growth of the strata of "the excluded" in the affluent consumption society, which appears as a perverse effect of it, is also a major problem with which sociologists are now confronted.

There was a reaction of sociological thought to all these new social phenomena at the end of the century. Such a message has been conveyed by the scholars of the Frankfurt School. Its representatives not only experienced contemporaneously these events but the latter also brutally interfered and modified their lives. Therefore, their critique of the industrial civilization was profound and total, their approach desperate, their conclusions pessimistic. They considered that the domination of "the technological reason," its identification with the only possible ideology, and its pretension to offer a unique and all-encompassing ethos are the inevitable outcomes of what they

defined as "late capitalism." This last stage of the industrial society—our society at the end of the century—characterized by the huge development of science and technology that became its main value reference, generates economic prosperity but creates an "undimensional man," stripped of sociological imagination and the capacity to react creatively to the human challenges of the new society. The main social discourse of the "late capitalism" is "the language of the purpose" instead of "the language of meaning." The scholars of the Frankfurt School thus considered the postmodern society as an epoch of decadence.

Wise sociologists like Raymond Aron were also ready to concede that the industrial civilization, in spite of its successes, doesn't always lead to a continuous and general positive development. The unprecedented advance of science allows us to penetrate more and more domains of the micro- and macrouniverse that in the past were unknown or relegated to mysterious metaphysics. Nature's laws are unveiled in a breathtaking rhythm, increasing the Promethean powers of man without, however, making him the master of the universe.

The accelerating process of industrialization that created the modern and even the postmodern civilization doesn't eliminate the traditional history, the emergence of imperia, the rivalries between different political regimes, the accumulation of manipulative power and the terrible fight that accompanies it, or even the negative interventions of different dominant personalities. In other terms, it doesn't eliminate the importance of the political order. Modernization and postmodernization being inevitable social processes didn't and will never eliminate "history as usual," as it existed from the beginning of human society. That is the "drama" that accompanies—and one may say destroys permanently—the "natural" progressive flow of social previsible processes. R. Aron didn't offer a solution, but he warned that in the globalized society of the end of the century many categories that formed the basic conceptual pattern of modernity, such as democracy, freedom, reason, and tolerance, had to be redefined. Some criteria of orientation still remain. "Beyond science and beyond logic, morality can, if not refute, at least appreciate ideologies. Generally speaking, value preferences, while not susceptible of proof are nonetheless capable of reasonable, if not rational justification."

It seems that Wallerstein's scenario offers a more appropriate description of post-modern society. The process of globalization is expressed not so much in the diminution of social differences but in the generalization of the capitalist civilization. That means that the unprecedented and apparently unlimited process of technological progress is accompanied by the perennial existence and continuous emergence of what is called "the excluded." In the terms of core states and periphery Wallerstein emphasizes that there will be always a category of states, groups, people, or persons who will not have access not only to power, but even to recognition, and who will not benefit from the advantages of the consumption society, beginning with education and medical care and ending with elementary human rights. This image, however incomplete, is not too far from a real description of postmodern society and points to the important factor in its destabilization.

As we have seen, sociological thought is not insensitive to this new situation. More than that, there are some tentative theoretical directions to handle the conceptual constructions of a destabilized, pluralist society in which there is a proliferation of traditional and new or renovated ideas.

In such a critical situation for sociological thought Marx, following Hegel's dialectics, suggested the use of "a negation of the negation." That means the discovery of what is new and eventually contradictory, but yet undeveloped in traditional thought, and to elaborate it in totally new concepts and critical categories, able to explain and thus understand the new social events. But in his conception this operation is possible as a consequence of a complete social revolution. And as nowadays revolutions, for better or for worse, are "passe," out of date, this solution is practically nullified.

There is also Kuhn's model of the structure of scientific revolutions, which states that between old paradigms and new developments of social facts and the elaboration of new models of explanation that the old paradigms are no longer able to explain in a meaningful way, there is a period of crisis, eventually a period of stagnation and lack of proper theoretical activity. It seems that this model, too, doesn't correspond to the present situation. We cannot concede to a crisis in the field of sociological theories, to the existence of a theoretical vacuum. On the contrary, lots of theories appear, each based on and promoting different approaches, and they coexist one

along the other and not one against the other. Our pluralistic society is perhaps also expressed in the diversification of social thought and in the lack of conflict between one generally accepted or dominant theory and other theories that express a contradictory point of view. Once this was called eclecticism with a negative connotation. Today this may be considered as an outburst of creative pluralist sociological thought. Though the subject matter of these theories is actually as diversified as the different aspects of our pluralist society, it seems that there is a new dimension with which all of them, more or less, are concerned and this is the redefinition of "Homo Sociologicus." In the terms of Giddens' "self identity" and especially in Alain Touraine's conception of the "sujet," the social actor of our pluralist society is no more a person whose principal purpose is to fulfil as perfectly as possible the roles and obligations ascribed by the social system. The actual "Homo Sociologicus" is far from his functionalist predecessor and at the same time far from a critical position as a permanent challenger of the social system. The new "Homo Sociologicus" conceived as a "sujet" is a person who creates reality according to his views, interests, imaginary world, and type of culture, which he chooses independently in the name of the freedom of choice. The new social actor is preoccupied, first of all, not with changing or improving reality on the basis of some rational ideas, but with forging his own identity according to his wishes and eventually seeking and finding a collective identity. In the name of the *droit à la différence*—the right to be different, which is an extension of postmodern democracy, each person or group of persons becomes free to choose and express their own racial, tribal, ethnic, religious, and parareligious or parascientific conceptions. In this situation the reasonable thought with universally acknowledged values of freedom, democracy, justice, with its general definition of the good and the beautiful (Kallos Ke Agathon) is atomized into numerous reasons that are justifying all kinds of fanaticisms, dogmatisms, and in the end violence, exemplified by ethnic and racial genocide and fundamentalist terror.

The principle of reason that was the basic assumption of the discourse of modern society from the enlightenment on, with its connotation of values that implied also a universal ethos, a morality, was conceived as a unifying element of mankind. The rationality of Homo Sapiens with his reasonable thought was also conceived as a main instrument for finding the scientific truth and thus science came

to be regarded as one of the most valuable achievements of our society. Now, along with the expulsion of reason from the existential domain, there are also attempts to challenge its importance in the epistemological sphere. The idea of rationality, on which the generally accepted theory of knowledge was based, assumed a priori the existence of an objective reality and the possibility that the rational mind can discover its more profound aspects and laws and that way can enhance the possibility for mankind to live better, to cope with the shortcomings caused always by ignorance and prejudice. This principle becomes doubtful today, in effect due to new scientific findings. The objective reality *per se* doesn't exist anymore; it is not accepted as given, or to put it in other terms, the target of reasonable thought is not any longer to discover nature's laws, but to construe reality and develop its own possibilities and creative capacities. This special aspect of destructivism is leading to "a perfect crime" (*une crime parfait*), in J. Baudrillard's terms. The destruction of the relation between objective reality and the possibility of rational thought to completely unravel it is in effect a perfect crime because the basic principle of our method of knowledge is totally challenged. Ultimately the subject and the object are one. We can apprehend the essence of the world only if we can appraise the radical equivalence between the object-reality and the subject-reality. This leads to absolute destruction and total crime because something is absolutely destroyed and nothing comes instead.

The modern society based on the principle of reasonable thought was supposed to achieve "the good society" not only by creating economic prosperity but by eliminating wars, violence, despotisms, and dogmatisms. It didn't. The postmodern society that emphasizes the role of the imaginary, the primordial imaginary, expressed in cultural traditions and legitimized as a reason for its pluralism is a fact. Thus, the pluralist society in its turn gives right of existence to numerous different types of culture, to a cultural pluralism. Not only the culture of each nation but that of each ethnic group, of tribal societies, of forms of religions rediscovered from ancient times or reinvented now with each system of tribal customs and behaviors, are considered legitimate in the process of forging a personal or collective identity. They furnish not only *une raison d'être*, but the only real reason and, eventually, the only moral values for the existence of these entities.

We can agree with A. Finkelkraut that this process gives rise to a rediscovering of the significance and power of the *Volkgeist*: that means the exclusiveness of each culture, its specificity, and eventually its confrontation with other cultures.

According to this basic concept of German romanticism, each culture has its own concepts of good, right, truth, and moral values. Now at the same time it can be said that the universal reason promoted by the enlightenment, the reason expressed by science and agnosticism, became in postmodern society some kind of imperialistic force. Ignoring the different primordial symbolic discourse of each social entity, its specific imaginary, modern, reasonable thought struggled against all old prejudices, endeavored to eradicate ignorance, and tried to establish universal humanitarian values. Thus it acted as an arrogant uniformizer of cultures, promoting a kind of forced cultural assimilation.

The process of decolonization that gave rise to the actual proliferation of cultures and challenged the legitimacy of universal reason was supposed to establish an age of general understanding, conciliation, and mutual recognition between all these cultures. It was supposed to destroy the inequality between superior and inferior cultures, advanced and primitive, and to create a convivial society.

Instead of this we have today another image of the pluralism of cultures. In search for identity—a different identity—a multitude of groups, sects, or schools of thought appear, claiming total social recognition and not only the right of legal existence but also declaring their beliefs as being the only just and right ones. It seems that instead of peaceful coexistence, the pluralism of cultures creates a permanent basis of a Hobbesian “every man against every man.” Habermas, speaking of postmodern society, remarked that the extension of the means of communication not only allows a wide range of information but is also conducive to a permanent connection between different people, different cultures, and different social discourses, and thus facilitates a better general understanding, a blurring of real or apparent contradictions. But he warns at the same time that this process may become really positive only when it is performed between equal members. In the end, in spite of its beneficial aspects, the globalization of information doesn’t minimize the possibility of conflicts or terrorism as long as the fundamental social problems are not resolved or at least approached in an active way.

It can be underlined also, as a concluding remark, that if the pluralist society and the pluralism of cultures of the postmodern era discarded "reason" as a unique etalon of humankind, it discarded also its fundamental connotations: freedom, democracy, universal values of justice, truth and good, and the ethos of the dignity of man beyond differences of race, sex, religion, national belonging, and so on.

The pluralist society with its diversity of cultures is a fact. But the cunning of *reason* surfaces in that, in spite of the endless diversity, we have to find a fundamental unifying conception that should express the universal values that give men and society the honorable basis upon which the very idea of universal humanity can be sustained.

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Part 1

Values and Cultural Changes in the Postmodern World

1

Space in the Globalizing World

Zygmunt Bauman

A bizarre adventure happened to space on the road to globalization: it lost its importance while gaining in significance. On one hand, as Paul Virilio insists (Virilio, 1999), territorial sovereignty has lost almost all substance and a good deal of its former attraction: if every spot can be reached and abandoned instantaneously, a permanent hold over a territory with the usual accompaniment of long-term duties and commitments turns from an asset into a liability and becomes a burden rather than a resource in the power struggle. On the other hand, as Richard Sennett points out, “As the shifting institutions of the economy diminish the experience of belonging somewhere special ... people’s commitments increase to geographic places like nations, cities and localities” (Sennett, 1999). On one hand, everything can be done to other people’s far-away places without going anywhere. On the other hand, little can be prevented from being done to one’s own place, however stubbornly one holds on to it.

This curious, confused, and confusing condition tends to generate equally ambivalent politics—and both are reflected in the notorious perplexities of the “globalization” debate. By its nature, all theory postulates a consistent and coherent reality, and so the glaring incoherence in the perception and treatment of space makes theorizing a truly daunting task.

To reduce the confusion somewhat, the conspicuously “uneven” or one-sided nature of the globalizing tendency needs to be admitted. The starting point of all sensible attempts to comprehend the condition brought about by that tendency must be the heeding of Jonathan Friedman’s (Friedman, 1999) word of caution: Globalization “does not mean unification or even integration in any other way