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LUXURY AS OPENNESS TO THE WORLD

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In nature, bounty colors in plants and animals have a specific meaning, namely: “I warn you! I am dangerous. Don’t bug me!”. In some other occasions, colors and feathers, even shapes and protuberances both in animals and in flowers, for instance, bear a particular meaning, too. They mean something like: “I like you! Be with me! I am worth leaving with”. These and many other examples referred by naturalists and biologists, among other scientists, and nowadays known by a wide public, bear a significant scope on what luxury is from a naturalistic point of view.

Indeed, from a naturalistic point of view, luxury can be associated with shapes, colors, feathers, lines, protuberances, size and even strange behaviors. Not only nature shows a wonderful array of all kinds of colors, shapes, sizes and structures but one can easily appreciate that some or most of them have an survalue, yet not immediately understood.

Thus, luxury is not to be taken just as framed within the consumption society, as a banality or a frivolity, as it happens in human culture, but rather also as a biological feature bearing an economic function. In nature, such economic function is survival and fitness. In other words, such a function is basically oriented to survival or protection. Thus, it can be said that what can be taken as luxury in nature is a matter of selection. Following up the line of these descriptions, Morris Desmond proved once that around 70% of human movements, gestures and acts are moved by a sort of aesthetical impulse, by which Desmond meant movements of hands, hair, one’s clothes and costumes, and

the like. If so, then such an aesthetical move is closely related to luxury and is more a natural feature than just a cultural trait.

In the western world, luxury has been basically associated with material stuffs, such as collars, jewels, particular clothes or colors, and the like, particularly after the Industrial Revolution and the triumph of the liberal revolution. Hence, luxury is a matter of showing up and exteriority. M. Foucault is right when he characterizes the western mind as a thought of exteriority (*une pensée de l'exteriorité*). Not by chance, the basic way of thinking in the western world has been in terms of space and spatiality, for time was indeed a very late invention or discovery in the western world. As a consequence, luxury was and is still associated generally with richness, wealth, banality, frivolity, and last but not least, with consumption, discrimination and idleness.

There is, at it happens, a big gap in the understanding of luxury when we move from nature to culture, and backwards. The aim of this text is to provide a bridge enabling us to overcome that gap. New insights will show thanks to that bridging, we hope.

Being supplied with goods and commodities that are not properly needed means that such commodities and goods are not necessary from a biological point of view. Therefore, those supplies considered as luxurious bear a meaning from a mere cultural standpoint. Culture seems to overwhelm biology by the production of supplies that are relevant as a sign of class, wealth, prestige and the like. Moreover, the culture of capitalism consists in a production of unnecessary goods that are not needed or required if it is not by the spirit of showing up and appearance. However, they are meaningless from a biological and even from a spiritual point of view. At least, such is the story as it goes for the western world. For our considerations here, we are to take the Western world as the one that begins in ancient Greece that has been characterized as the phase from the transitions from archaic to classical Greece, from myth to logos, after the Dictatorship of the Thirty, and we the government of Solon and Pericles. In others words, it begins with the transition from the Pre-Socratics to Socrates. The rest, as it is often said, is history.

Thereafter, luxury and lush have been institutionalized as “pomp and circumstance”, whereby dignity is associated with luxury, as well as class, knowledge, social stance and role, as it were.

As we can easily see, it is necessary to trace conceptual and semantic distinctions. According to Plato, that is the first task of philosophers, especially when they are confronted with sophistry, i.e. sophists.

I

Luxurious goods have been recognized and studied all along human history, ever since Altamira (in Spain) and Lascaux (in France). As such, luxurious goods were originally associated with art and a sort of esthetics, and were registered by anthropologists, archeologists and historians. Handcraft, art, architecture, and even trade were usually associated as means or variables to luxury. Usually they were registered within the records of class, religion, power and wealth. I firmly believe that such a general view is, however, not very enriching for a right understanding of luxury in our contemporary world. I shall come later to what our world is all about, in contrast with past worlds.

I would like to stress that luxury, when viewed as a materiality and exteriority (in Foucault’s sense), rests on appearance and creates thus a sense of dependence upon the other’s perception. J.-P. Sartre highlighted the importance of such a perception as *le regard de l’autre* (the other’s glance) as an ontological matter; that is, as that relation through which we are given being or are taken being away. Usually that was the case as framed from the point of view of the many vis-à-vis the few.

From this point of view, luxury depends on a relation through which one or some are viewed in a higher layer while someone else or others remain on a lower rank. Luxury thus is set to be viewed and appreciate by others, and not just by oneself, namely the one who owns those goods taken as luxurious. The importance of the other’s glance, in Sartrean terms, is thus the glance that brings forth meaning or takes meaning away. Meaning is henceforth the ontological feature based on appearance and showing up, a relation of exteriority.

As a consequence, luxury is not so much of importance in itself, but an external layer of an ontological relation whose function consists in setting up an asymmetrical relationship. From this point of view, we are quite far from joining luxury and coziness or luxury and comfort. Coziness and comfort place as in a quite different dimension. At most, they could be taken into consideration here just as a justification –namely, a *subjective* justification-, of luxury and idleness.

On the contrary, in eastern world, luxury if such a thing exists, is not associated with idleness except when it is related with political or military power. In any case, luxury does not set asymmetrical relations since the importance of the other's glance is quite lower if not inexistent.

What can be taken as a luxury is associated with peace of mind, with not needing anything or at least –and certainly most difficult-, with knowing what to want or desire (and what not to), with the capacity of bracketing external wants. In one word, eastern world could be said to link luxury to interiority. Interiority is linked here with what could be said as a principle of autonomy. Such a comprehension, however, does a very little favor to the right understanding of luxury for westerners, as it were.

Capitalism is the realm of exteriority, appearance and a justified and institutionalized asymmetry. Classical authors in economics such as Ricardo, Smith, Marx and Mill, are right in asserting that capitalism is grounded on the primacy of the goods, namely, material goods: merchandise and commodities. Among these authors, Marx was particularly conspicuous when he realized that a material good or merchandise hides human relationships, human time, in fact, human life.

Thus, for the western world, and most especially in capitalism, luxury has come to mean lavish spending, lasciviousness, the acquisition of unessential possessions, the full enjoyment of all senses. Impressing others without really caring about them, and marking distances and superiorities is what it has truly come to mean. Capitalism was a trend to consumption as a life-style, and this trend came to be institutionalized throughout various means. “Live and consume... hence, live!” is a sort of mantra.

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G. Deleuze and F. Guattari once stressed clearly the relationship between capitalism and schizophrenia in the sense that we have become desiring, i.e. wanting machines. At first, throughout publicity and propaganda we desire goods we do not really need, just for the sake of having a sort of social approval and acceptance. Afterwards, and pretty soon in reality, we do not really want what others have or possess, but we truly want their wants and desires. In other words, we want to be or to become like others and moreover the others themselves. It is via this shift of desires that we become wanting machines and even schizophrenic beings, for we completely dissociate our real being from our wanting or desiring being, subjugating the latter to the former at the cost of finally not really knowing what we need, have, want – are.

II

We are entering a new phase in human history. Various names and labels have been brought to call this emerging phase, such as knowledge society, second modernity, or globalization. It can be easily assessed that either when facing such a new phase or entering into it, the concept and reality what is luxurious has to be reframed if not entirely modified.

“However, since the consumer society was set up, four changes have completely altered the circumstances in which it operates. First, whereas only per cent of the working population originally earned its living other than by industry and agriculture, today, in developed countries, two-thirds do so by supplying

services rather than by making objects. This means, secondly, that what consumers now buy, and desire, more than objects, are services, that is to say personal contact, help and advice. Thirdly, the cost of goods has diminished but that of services has not; for a while it seemed as though self-service would be the answer, but the time became the most precious of all commodities. Ownership of goods did not free time; rather it added new commitments and opportunities for using up time. Fourthly, the idea of luxury has expanded so that the most desirable luxuries are those that money cannot buy, involving not so much possessions as human relations” (Zeldin, 1994: 295).

I would like to assess that nowadays and towards future, there is a new meaning and reality of what luxury is about. What can be pointed out as luxury today, and in future? Three subjects arise as the main concern that helps us to understand a new concept of luxury. These are: time, leisure, and life.

We have come to find our own being on the possession of (material) goods and on dependence of the approval of others. Hence, we root our autonomy in exteriorities, which is an open contradiction. However, we have indeed come to be in need of what is not well known, because it was hidden by the goods, commodities and merchandises. Somehow we lost ourselves in the jungle of goods, desires and external approvals. Moreover, such a story was institutionalized in various ways and what could be seen as a personal drama has really become a social or cultural tragedy. History as a whole, at least for the official version of history in the western world, seems to be lost, perhaps even sick.

Nonetheless, a series of totally unexpected processes and phenomena arose that make us aware of the very fact that we were at odds with ourselves or our deepest possibilities. Among those phenomena and processes we can mention, as examples, the exhaustion of some of the natural resources, the integration of mankind as a whole with large-scale sensitivities and interdependence, the very complexification of variables, and the integration of nature and culture in ways that were inexperienced before in human history.

As a consequence, what was hidden jumped, so to speak, to the forefront and started to be fully appreciated. Time had become shortened and cut as an every-day experience; leisure was not available any longer to most human beings because work and labor –in H. Arendt’s sense- were imposed upon them. Life, in sum, has come to be recognized

as a true necessity in times of a systematic violence, uncertainty, and . Yet, what is not well known is not idle.

Over against history, when facing knowledge society we deal not any more with material goods, but with immaterial goods, such as knowledge, environment, peace, solidarity, human safety, research, time and life, for instance. The transition from the previous societies that exist and have existed in history to the knowledge society is not just the transition from economies based on agriculture-cattle ranch, manufacture-industry and services, to knowledge economy. It is rather, a transition from societies based upon finite material goods to undetermined immaterial goods. As such, we are facing a deep revolution both in culture and history with long-range consequences that are to be cautiously examined and evaluated.

We have entered in a time when the superfluous can begun to be seen as such and hence, not needed. M. Max-Neef's approach to economics makes a great contribution in this sense.

III

Time has been properly invented or discovered by the 20th Century. It is true that the word "time" existed in previous languages, both in East and West, but as a R. Magritte has put it clearly enough, the existence of a word does not imply the existence of the thing: "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*".

We can clearly point to three different origins of time during the 20th century, thus: first, Husserl's phenomenology discovered inner time as opposed to real or physical time, as well as the every-day time conceived as the life-world (*Lebenswelt*); second, Einstein's theory of relativity shows for the first time in history that the variations and changes of space are simultaneously changes and variations of time, so much so that since Einstein we are forced to talk not about time and space as two variants or dimensions, but as the continuum space-time; third and most significantly, I. Prigogine introduces time and history and the physical sciences – physics and chemistry – and the irreversibility of time, for the first time in western scientific worldview.

Additionally, we assist to the death of distance thanks to having incorporated the concept of “real time” grounded on the informational and computational devices and sciences developed in the second half of the 20th century. The new technologies, often quoted as the information and communication technologies (ICT), play an important role in integrating life as a global phenomenon and proving the real interdependence and sensibility of cultures, civilizations, nations, societies and individuals in a manner never ever experienced before by mankind.

Time becomes thus an inescapable experience due precisely to its irreversibility and the manifold of both positive and negative loops that generate or inhibit a variety of other actions and trends affecting society at large in various ways in three modes: immediate, middle-range and effects, and large-scale and consequences.

Therefore, we become conscious as never before about both limitation and finitude and the possible and indeterminate thanks to the very flow of time as global and personal, yet irreversible, reality that encompass any comprehension of life and nature, of earth and the cosmos as a large and close unity, as never before.

Moreover, before long, we came to find ourselves as being not the center of creation any longer, but simply as a node of a wide network that changes and varies, and whose links are flexible in time.

IV

Leisure has being acknowledged since ancient Greece as the condition for creativity in arts, thought and social life. As a consequence, leisure was not so much an outcome of certain conditions, as the dimension opened at the extreme of a segment that ended in work and labor. Since then, different authors have coincided in the *topos* of leisure in opposition to the world of work – such as Marx, Heidegger and Arendt, for instance – even though their understanding of leisure varies in time and intention.

“Leisure is a form of that stillness that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear. Such stillness as this is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness; it means, rather, that the soul’s power, as real, or responding to the real – a *co-*

respondence, eternally established in nature – has not yet descended into words. Leisure is the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion – in the real. In leisure, there is, furthermore, something of the serenity of ‘not-being-able-to-grasp’, or the recognition of the mysterious character of the world, and the confidence of blind faith, which can let things go as they will; there is in it something of the ‘trust in the fragmentary, that forms the very life and essence of history’” (Pieper, 1998: 31).

In the aftermath of the ancient world in Greece and Rome, leisure was conceived rather a kind of disease and relaxation of life that was fond of laziness and sin. The outcomes of Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the beginnings of modernity displaced leisure to spaces close to anarchy, utopia or a romantic *esprit*. Such was particularly the state in 19th century when a sort of leisure was associated to the dandy way-of-life or the kind of sophistry that characterized les *poets maudits* that lived somewhere between poetry, essay, feuilletons and a sort of “politics of the individual” in the midst of a social and cultural crisis.

From many if not from all points of view – something that reminds us the question raised in the frame of cognitive sciences by “the view from nowhere” – leisure is by all means a luxury, both for society and the individual. To be sure, it is a luxury emerging from a way-of-life that is to be framed into the fact that life was acquired a different time scale than before.

Leisure, indeed, can be seen as a human possibility that remains valid for any human being, regardless of its economic position, its race and religious belief, that can be enjoyed in youth as well as in old age or in any intermediary stage of life. Aging, to be sure, is not so much a matter of biology as a cultural matter, and this has to do with the relationship between work, labor and leisure. Old people need to be needed, and need to have something useful and meaningful to do. In that same tenure, youth is certainly a dissipation of energy that carries with itself a sense of adventure, challenge, absence of limits and a sort of madness. These traits, however, are not to be appreciated as mere cultural features, for they are rooted in biology.

It belongs to the nature of young animals to challenge the norms, customs and realities they inherit and within which they are born and are “raised”. When they become older, animals in general have somehow learned pain, failure and limitations of some sort.

These print a sense of reduction to the norms and of prudence in their life so that they tend to be less challenging and adventurous.

From this point of view, we can safely say that leisure is an experience that unites life with a time dimension that transcends immediacy, urgencies and conveniences. Moreover, leisure is a sense of time that knows not real references to what is generally acknowledged, accepted or experienced. This, however, does not imply that leisure is just a personal or individual experience. Instead, leisure is a relation of ourselves with others that is not simply reduced to benefit or pragmatism, in any sense.

The question about what are we going to do with ourselves is simple the question concerning what we going to do with time, namely with that time that is left after we do what we were supposed to do. Freedom as well as liberty have become thus closely related with time in the sense that time that belongs properly to us is leisure. Put the words of the ancient Greeks, it is *kairos* over against *chronos*, a distinction that can hardly be made when translated into the main western languages.

Hence, leisure is *kairos* as that time that must not be socially accounted for, but is to be enjoyed and lived “from within”. Here goes the very personal realization or fulfillment of existence – for example as spiritual, metaphysical, personal, autonomous our even autarchic – as you wished.

If think Husserl and Heidegger are right in pointing out –from different perspectives, though-, that our inner being is rooted in time as an intentional or metaphysical stance. I would like to stress that such a stance at the same time opens us to the world and to transcendence, and makes a singular person or reality from each of us. In other words, inner time or *kairos* as the experience out of which real or objective time grounds and emerges having a particular meaning. Objective time does not exist in its own when isolated from the inner experience which sends us back to the meaning of leisure.

Thus, objective time is the way in which both work and labor exist, whilst *kairos* corresponds to that time where leisure is experienced, lived and enjoyed, namely, as a timeless personal experience.

One of the most important tasks society at large must face – and is indeed facing, particularly in some European countries – consists in developing an education system for the elder that provides them not only with new knowledge and up-to-date tools and languages of different kind, but mainly with new possibilities and an enlarged and deepened time perspective in time.

V

As a result of a life devoted to work and labor, we have come to forget what is most important and needed: life itself. With labor and work we have alienated ourselves in exactly the sense that this concept has in Marxist terms, namely, we lost ourselves in the realm of material goods and material production relations.

Hence, life – namely quality of life as well as a life with dignity – has become a true luxury in the sense of a value that seems not to belong to us anymore. We have alienated ourselves from what is the very source of any reality as well as of any possibility. Thus, life as hope, expectation, health and enjoyment appears to us a mere fragmentation in space, time, circumstances and events, but not as a whole or continuity. Put in classical terms, we need to get back to life, but I would rather prefer to shall look forward to what is most needed and wanted, and henceforth, is a real luxury, namely an authentic sense of living.

Life, however, is not an essence or an entity of any sense of the word. It is, rather, a relationship. We shall never find any meaning or sense of life that either sends us backwards or forwards to other living beings, other's experiences, other times and places where we encounter diversity, alterity and difference. If we pretend to peel the onion in order to find its quintessential core we will end by losing the onion itself. Such is, to be sure, the very essence of life: an open set of networks and links that is fundamentally unlimited and undetermined.

“In private life, the counterpart of public debate is conversation. The word sounds old-fashioned and its meaning is blurred, because in the years since conversation was given a name and made an ideal, its nature has changed as much as that of public debate – and for the same reasons. Yet whether we use

the word to mean all forms of verbal exchange or, more narrowly, the sociable sifting of opinion for pleasure, conversation is the testing ground of manners. This is so because manners are minor morals which facilitate the relations of men, chiefly through words. When those verbal relations are deliberately staged, for no other purpose than pleasure, men find themselves engaged in an intellectual exercise that is one of the delights of life. Manners, therefore, are not solely a clue to the deeper moral assumptions of an age, they are also a strong or weak guardian of Intellect at its most exposed” (Barzun, 2002: 62).

The real pleasures in life, Descartes once said, are those ones that rarely produce laughing or are hilarious. Perhaps the most valued relationship in life emerges from *agape*, and this can be called in a twofold way: either friendship or love, and both are rooted in *eros*.

The true love is the one that cannot be separated from friendship, even if friendship as such remains in a different layer as love. Nonetheless, both love and friendship find in conversation a timeless experience that makes us enjoy life with no limits of time or space. Stillness and joy, grace and delight, growth and intimacy, gratuity and openness, discovery and remembrance, all them constitute a true and sincere conversation, an unknown luxury in our times – in times when it is assessed, for example, that in politics there are no friends, only allies – a world in which in economics at large it is said that there are no friends, only partners.

Conversation is an endless goal and uninterested dialogue. In conversation times does not exist, and space knows not limit. Conversation is a rare experience and a true luxury that can be pursued and reached on the basis of intellectual, aesthetic or truly human if not bodily exchange. It is an intercourse through which we come to loose ourselves and, paradoxically, we encounter our won and real selves.

VI

As a matter of fact, luxury is grounded on a particular way of habiting in our planet, namely the urban, in cities and around cities. Viewed from a rural standpoint, it is extremely rare if not extravagant to see, assess or claim luxury in the frame of a rural way of life. If so, then a few words are to be said in regard to the relationship between luxury and cities.

As a result of the various processes of urbanization which entail quality of life –such as health services, for instance-, we have come to habit the Earth in cities so much so that a city is, in general terms, a *topos* where we tend to see our home. It is true that both the expectations of life as well as the hopes-for-life tend to be higher, i.e. longer when framed in a urban space than when they are situated in a sheer rural area. So, if we are to link life – expectations and hope we home, then we are forced to claim that our home is closely associated with the urban way of life, whereas the rural is linked not so much with our home, as with a bracketing of the urban, namely holidays, adventure, and relaxation – after which we “come back to reality”: the city.

As such, claiming that the rural as a general or even personal way of life appears in our contemporary world rather as an idyllic or bucolic claim. Not the mention the fact that the urbanization of the world clearly appears as an irreversible trait of the ongoing times.

“As cities grow in size and complexity, as their citizens define the good life in material terms, as they acquire the political power to insist on their right to that good life, so does the maintenance of the urban order require a steadily greater sphere of collective action. Not necessarily public action, notice: collective action can and often does consist in giving wider powers to private agents, and during the twentieth century our cities seem to have swing full circle from private to public and back to private agency again. What is undeniable and irreversible is the steady growth of collective provision” (Hall, 1998: 6).

Cities have become the home of most human beings around the world, and they determine both the standards of life and the normal way of life, currently. To be sure, there is no definite gap between rural and urban areas, but a sort of complementarities. This is so much true as it is viewed from the point of view of three different and tightly intertwined issues, namely the standards of life, the ways-of-life, and the quality of life.

Now, perhaps the most striking issue of all when dealing with the relationship between home or city and luxury has to do with the provision of goods. We encounter, therefore, two different modes of provision, thus: collective provision over against individual or personal provision and efforts to keep safe and well.

Thus, it becomes clear that the main subject about the provision of goods deals with the very fact of keeping well and safe, which is but a general way to refer to those conditions that make life possible and always more and more possible, for the very conditions for the quality of life guarantee the security – namely, the human security, as we have learned recently – of life. The rationale for such a security defines the structure, conditions, and capabilities that life has in the city. It is, therefore, not an exaggeration that human security can be recognized as a luxury for the current ongoing urban life.

VII

We can safely assess that luxury is that good, service or experience that exceeds the merely economical; it is an overvalue; moreover, a surplus. Luxury is to be seen in the contemporary state of human culture as what we do not need but is excelled as an extra – or a surplus. By this, a clear contrast can be made between the traditional approaches of luxury that conceived of it as an end in itself bearing a clear economical status or standard. Throughout such a contrast we face a quite new and different understanding of economics in the sense that it deals mostly with non material goods rather than with material goods. We refer by this to the economics of knowledge or the knowledge society, where luxury acquires a quite new frame and status.

Energy is a good example of the concerns knowledge society is based on. This can quickly be pointed out within the frame of non-linear systems, where we get to know that most of energy is not used, it is dissipated. We encounter thus the distinction between conservative structures and dissipative structure, being the latter the most relevant and meaningful of all phenomena and processes in our world. The study and understanding of dissipative structures owes much to the works by I. Prigogine. We do not use everything, and we do not really need everything. If so, yet, there is a surplus. The question then becomes: What can I want that I do not need? What can I want that is not needed? That, I claim, is the stance of luxury – as it arises from our contemporary perspective.

Luxury presupposes, thereafter, a relation; as such it is nodal in that it is related to something else than the “thing” itself. If so, then luxury does not relate just to a good or

supply, nor to a service. I would like to point to the time, life, home and leisure as the basic strictures of what is truly luxurious, yet not idle.

The bleak view offers us luxury as an externality, even in the sense economists talk about it. I have argued, instead, for a comprehension of luxury as what is most needed beyond time and space: life, leisure and *kairos*. Now we can see that they constitute a unity, which is undivided when rightly understood and experienced.

We have to know what we want and what we need. The most difficult thing in one's life, indeed, consists in correctly and properly *knowing* what one wants and needs. The second most difficult task in life consists in *reaching* what is wanted and needed. Most people do not know what they really want and need. They want things they do not really need, and, from a psychoanalytical point of view, they even come to want the wants and desires of others. They have become in what Deleuze and Guattari rightly call "wanting machines". As a consequence, they become schizophrenic, for such is the name for the way of living characterized by a strict dissociation between one's own reality and the outer reality in such a way that we cannot establish clear causal relationships, stands or levels. Everything becomes then blurry and structurally confused. Such is, those authors claim, the very nature of capitalism: it makes us schizophrenic in that we permanently want things we do not need, and we need things we do not know if we want them.

VII

Contemporary world: knowledge society. I believe that knowledge society – guided by cognitive engagements and concerns, is to place in the forefront the question about what is really worth to know and what knowledge is all about, after all. From a philosophical point of view various voices can be heard here, as polyphonic as they may be. I would like to mention here particularly Heidegger in his "The End of Philosophy and the Tasks of Thinking", specially when he points out to the need to think in contrast to just philosophizing or to practicing scientific rationality, for both have failed in bringing up what is truly essential and needed.

We need to know what we truly need and want – this, I claim is the touchstone of the knowledge society. Through various gates, so to speak, we are entering a new stage in human history in which knowledge defines at the same time our innermost realities and possibilities. Moreover, it appears as if our true future or being-to-come depend intrinsically on what we know and how we get to know it. Information is certainly important here. But over information knowledge emerges as the key factor upon which we can discard what is superfluous from what is essential. Everything seems to point to the fact that what in past was essential appears now as accidental or banal.

The essential was covered or hidden in past history by idle goods and appearance. This story, however, does not imply that we must look backwards to a time when we once had what we lost, for there is nothing like that in past to be found. Our best possibilities lie in future. We can say in an extreme case that the worst future is and will always be better than the best of past times, simply because we do have future. From this standpoint, future emerges as generous simply because it is the most open time dimension ever to explore and experience. Thus, future is a name for hope and expectation, which is the real core of life and time, of leisure and home.

Luxury is henceforth, more a possibility than an actual asset, openness rather than a closure and distance of/between classes, levels, layers or ranges; in other words, a relation rather than a state.

“But, perhaps, that has always been the story of the greatest cities: earthly utopias they were not, places of stress and conflict and sometimes actual misery they certainly were. Those who find them distasteful or disagreeable can – and will – get out them, to arcadian suburbs and garden cities; and policies should help them so, if that is what they want. Cities were and are quite different places, places for people who can stand the heat of the kitchen: places where the adrenalin pumps through the bodies of the people and though the streets on which they walk; messy places, sordid places sometimes, but places nevertheless superbly worth living in, long to be remembered and long to be celebrated” (Hall, 1998: 989).

We seem constrained to the fact luxuries are closely related to urban life. If so, a luxury are closely related to openness to the world, and therefore, to openness to what are most needed and wanted, namely relationships that fill in and fulfill our own being. Conversation, leisure, time as *kairos*, home and life as such are to be then appreciated as

what is to be wanted and needed above anything else, for without them we remain fragmentary, unfulfilled, and alienated.

As I have tried to point it out, luxury, when rightly understood is to be grasped from a natural perspective rather than from a mere cultural standpoint. This implies, hitherto, that nature as such must be re – interpreted and re – discovered. The new emerging sciences, for instance, have done a great deal towards such an understanding of nature and for a naturalization of the human and cultural facts and traits. Without this implying a conservative or regressive perspective at all, we can claim that the truly valuable and worth is natural rather than cultural. Life, leisure, home and time as chance and opportunity – *kairos* – are the most basic, and yet meaningful, natural realities. I will not say that these are the only ones, simply the most relevant when understanding and re – phrasing what luxury is about.

To sum up, in a few words: luxury must be correctly understood and interpreted vis-à-vis a biological function, namely survival, dignity and quality of life. When this does not take place, luxury can and should be banned – or at least radically transformed – from the human scenario.

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