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Manifesto for a Revolution of the West

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Volume 1 Issue 1 (March 1999) Article 5

**Armando Gnisci,
"Manifesto for a Revolution of the West"**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/5>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 1.1 (1999)***
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/>>

Abstract: Armando Gnisci's article, "Manifesto for a Revolution of the West," is a proposal for solidarity and action he understands as "revolution" against inequities and injustice. The world, conquered by the Eurocentric will-to-power, already centrifuged and spread across the globe, is now in sight of a new era. Images of the near future are appearing on the horizon: the rich and powerful North dominates and wastes the South. The cruelty of this Brave New World is contrasted with the utopian diaspora of de-colonizers, the "Creolisation" of mind and cultures, the resistance of differences, and revolution. The first image, to which we all involuntarily belong, leads to the destitution of the world. The second, a scattered hope, leads to an inevitable opposition of the first. It must be possible to move our Western culture and destiny toward a "common place," where we can be together with our brothers and sisters: Creoles, half-castes, immigrants, the oppressed, the unemployed, clandestines, and revolutionaries; where we can contribute to a world-wide colloquium of active utopia and revolution against inhumanity.

Armando GNISCI

Manifesto for a Revolution of the West

What can a West-European scholar of comparative literature, such as myself, say that may be used favorably on behalf of the dignity and resistance of those oppressed in the world today? With my specific and personal cultural background and formative actions in regard to the younger generation, with my own destiny -- I migrated from the south to central Italy, to Rome, in the mid-1960s, from an almost middle-class family moving closer and closer toward poverty -- and my constant attempts to turn the tables in the game for upward mobility, social responsibility, and equal opportunity, I believe in the ability to move my culture and destiny toward a common place, where I can be spiritually and intellectually together with my brothers and sisters of the world: half-castes, immigrants, the oppressed, unemployed, clandestines, and rebels. I believe that I too, can contribute to a world-wide colloquium of and for an active utopia and revolution against inhumanity. By this I refer to revolution as "the biggest form of civilization, the war against those who violate humanity" (note that this definition of civilization did not come from a professional revolutionary, but the philosopher of Liberalism, Karl Popper). Here, I invite you to read the following *Manifesto* with the understanding that it derives from the above outlined background and conviction. It has a rhetoric and a logical form, and it represents the hopes and the intellectual and emotional mobility of a modern-day European scholar.

The West no longer exists. There exists only a North of the world that subjugates and exploits the South in every way - wherever and elsewhere, as the poets put it. This *Manifesto* speaks of "Western" because it is intended to move the men and women of European culture toward "rebellion." And Europe is the only West that remains as such, in the North. Now that the United States represents the central axis of the world on both sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific, besides us "old" Westerners in the North, we are joined by what is still called the "Far East," Japan and other "tigers" of the Pacific. They have said for a long time that Western history is made up of epochs and discontinuity, eras, revolutions, eves and periods, paradigms and epistemology that are forever changing and thus they will take advantage of the given. And the fact that many countries in East Asia and South America are now undergoing serious economic difficulties does not and will not, in reality, diminish the market importance of these countries.

If we look back over three thousand years, we find a relatively safe, scientific, comparative, and worldly way to dating of time that could be used instead of the monotheistic, Western-Mediterranean religious calendars -- that form the actual history, sufficiently known and handed down by the West. This allows us, more or less, to construct a cognitive hypothesis that differs from those of other epochs in the image of procession of time. The mythic and archaic age and the *polis*, Hellenism and Rome, Empire and Christianity, Decline and Fall, the Middle-Ages, etc., form, along with other stages that eventually bring us to the present, a succession that should be interpreted by its continuity *and* discontinuity. It should be seized and used as a tool to induce the future. Therefore, the literature of procession -- progress is a separate issue and should be kept at a distance -- should be placed next to the vision of epoch and Foucault's "epistemic fractures." How should we consider Western history from the point of view of procession? And what should the regulations be in this procedure? Here is one proposal: we are dealing with a procession of: a) *grafting* (Rome with Athens, Athens with Egypt and the Middle East, etc.); b) *assimilation* (Christianity assimilates Roman ecumenical imperialism and Hellenic metaphysical philosophy, Germanism assimilates the *Latinitas*, etc.); and c) *renewal* (renaissance and rebirth, Classicism and Neo-Classicism, etc.).

This procession is centered around and strengthened by two fires that are both in harmony and conflict with each other: the Germanic-Roman tradition of a universal Empire and the Roman Catholic Apostolic *Ecclesia*. They form a "system" that centuries later evolves into a *European cultural identity*, an implosive accumulation of powers that we now call "Eurocentrism" -- contained within the East and South, from Islam to the mythically remote lands of India, China, and *Cipango*, and in the West delimited by the Atlantic border. In my opinion, with the discovery/conquest of the "new world" of America, we have the first real antropostoric -- and not just epistemic -- mutation of Western Europe. We are dealing here with more than the wonder when faced with the unknown, certainty of the shape of the Earth, the fact that we are on a circumnavigatable planet, and therefore finite etc. Instead,

other things happen: something unforeseeable and *mutational* occurs, namely, the emergence of the *urbi et orbi/universale* of the will-to-power Eurocentrism concentrated around the grafting of imperial Christianity. The foreigner/barbarian is no longer an enemy to fight against, convert, or dealt with diplomatically. Instead, anyone other than ourselves appears to be destined to be an absolute victim: they should and must be repressed, as if we were dealing with animals and plants -- stolen, uprooted, enslaved, destroyed, torn to pieces, and rubbed out, or, at best assimilated ad maiorem Dei et Europei gloriam. In the end, this is what the great Eurocentric *civile* vehicle, accumulating energy for two thousand years, is needed for: to give reason to Classical reason (Aristotle). Thus it is possible, at this moment in history, to affirm with certainty that there exists a humanity born free and a humanity born slaves, minorities, victims and repressed. The former can manhandle the latter as he wishes. The latter is utterly terrestrial, and not only logically. They have always been at the whim of the first. The rule of this grafting-assimilation-renewal procession is removed. The desire to repress, destitute and destroy, *beyond the logistics of war*, comes forth.. War is waged, either voluntarily or involuntarily, against the enemy. In the Americas, Africa, and Australia there are no enemies, only *humanimals*, slaves-victims, forever waiting to see themselves defeated. Montezuma and the Aztecs waited for the return of Quetzalcoatl and they found him in Cortez.

The so-called spiritual Power, is no longer in conflict with the Imperial power and, apart from Europe, the powers of the enemy Islam. It now *converts* the subjugated to a universal religion that conciliates them with the free and powerful. It looks after them, because all men are equal *in the eyes of God*, and therefore, in the after life. From this, Eurocentrism has spread across the globe proclaiming itself a *universal civilisation*. It forms the grounds upon which the New Total Dominion reigns imperially: the great motor of capitalism, oiled and tuned to perfection in the workshops of technicians and the private conference rooms of banks and corporations. It presently has no opponents and is also called Neo-liberalism. "Modernity" is a new phase in which this conquest-explosion-totalitisation of European will-to-power, self-centered and therefore ready to expand, is brought to completion, rapidly and unstoppable. Artists, first bound to tradition, the Court, God, and to a certain restlessness, have now ceased to see themselves as renovators of the past. They now proclaim themselves in favor of Modernity, with all its triumphs and wounds. Advanced Modernity, in which we all live -- as I write today, 16th of June 1997, according to the *universal* Christian calendar -- has created and at the same time left the museum and the academe with the task of restoring and conserving tradition. Modernity no longer renews (itself) by digging up the past and replanting it. It demands from itself that it begins from new epistemic conditions - *posthumity*. It is no longer invoked by "classical" tradition, before making its historical exit: when Socrates and Plato affirmed the fall of the *Sophia* and pronounced that the only thing left for them to do was *philosophize*; when Aristotle introduced the *history of philosophy*, claiming that only traces remained of the "old truths" of his day and when Medieval philosophers handed down their ideas as "gnomes on the shoulders of giants," and when they compared themselves to the ancient thinkers. *Posthumity* of our day seems to have become pertinent and projected further than the succession of history. Many among the so-called humanist intellectuals find this liberating and call it the *post-modern condition*.

The world, conquered by this Eurocentric will-to-power already centrifuged and spread across the globe, is now in sight of a new era. Images of the near future are appearing on the horizon: the rich and powerful North dominates and wastes the South. The cruelty of this *Brave New World* is contrasted with a utopic diaspora of de-colonizers, the "Creolisation" of minds and cultures, the resistance to differences and rebellion. The first image, to which we all involuntarily belong, leads to a bottomless destiny of destitution of man and the world. The second, a scattered hope, leads to an inevitable opposition of the first. It favours unpredictable humanity, conciliated and healthy, in harmony with the Earth. The second commands action, not just continuous reflection. In fact, the first is an enormous machine in constant motion. It cannot stop or be stopped. It can only be attacked. But who today is able to rebel, and how? Who can create utopia and opposition? With what culture and education, other than mere academia or mercantile prostitution? Before Modernity, the Western rebel class had always been the peasant class. They were not present at Pallacorda at the beginning of the French Revolution, as George Duby reminds us. Although today peasants and their world remain remnants of their former memories, their cry, "Freedom and Land, Tierra y Libertad!" still rings everywhere: in the Zapatista revolts at the beginning of the century and now again by the indios of

Chiapas and in the *Sem Terra* movement in Brasil. And the working class is on its way to become a phantom on the road to total unemployment. Its ex-Parties have either been liquified or transformed to the point of rejecting the farmer's sickle and the worker's hammer. They now sit on the right-hand side of the Great Father and administer public powers and services. But I hope and hope.

Author's profile: Armando Gnisci works in comparative literature and Italian studies in the Department of Italian Studies, University of Roma "La Sapienza." An author and/or editor of twenty-one books to date, he recently published, with Franca Sinopoli, *Manuale storico di letteratura comparata* (Meltemi, 1997). His works have also been translated into English, French, Spanish, Romanian, Slovak, Hungarian, Chinese, and Arabic. E-mail: <armando.nisci@uniroma1.it>