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Bülent Senay

PHILOSOPHY OF DIFFERENCE, HYPERMODERNITY, AND THE CITY OF "HAPPINESS" IN AL-FARABI'S "AL-MADINA AL-FADHILA"

The text describes the relationship between the three concepts – Philosophy of Difference, Hypermodernity, and the City of "Happiness". Starting from the notion of city as space, the autor considers how knowledge economy, information and virtual reality shape our perceptions of, and insights into, the meaning of life. Cities are spaces of "cultures" and culture in plural means difference. Identities are constructed within cultural boundaries. Processes of differentiation in constructing identities require a kind of philosophy of difference, as we live in a hypermodern urban space. It is spoken in detail about 21st century urban space as more and more multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious. In such an urban environment, identity constructions need a certain philosophy. This philosophy can only be a philosophy of difference. Difference and diferance here points at the idea of living together with "others" who are different than us in culture, worldview and religion. The author comes to the conclusion that our biggest challenge in cities is to make our cities centres of wisdom and happiness through education and moral decision-making processes based on a philosophy of difference and reflexivity.

Keywords: *philosophy of difference, hypermodernity, the city of happiness, multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious.*

I would like to speak about the relationship between the three concepts that the title of this paper points at, namely, *Philosophy of Difference, Hypermodernity*, and *the City of "Happiness"*. I am aware of the fact that it is not an easy task at all, and goes beyond the borders of a paper presentation. In the context of the '*philosophical problems of* information society, and cities in conditions of information society", this presentation is focused on "City policy and the conditions of information society".

Starting from the notion of CITY as space, I would like to briefly look into how the speed of "knowledge" and "information" economy creates differences that require a strong philosophical positioning in dealing with the **uncertainties** and **risks** of the 21st century"s "hypermodern" urban space. In doing so, I will use two philosophical reference points. I will start with contemporary French-Italian philosopher Paul Virilio"s ideas on the hypermodern city, which are also elaborated in his book *City of Panic* (Paul Virilio is the writer who coined

"dromology"), where he speaks about how knowledge economy, information and virtual reality shape our perceptions of, and insights into, the meaning of life. Then this discussion will be evaluated in the context of al-Farabi"s famous theory of "al-Madina al-Fadhila – the Virtuous City". This brings us to the idea of " **philosophy of difference"** in the city of the 21st century.

Cities are spaces of differences. Difference is a key concept of philosophy, denoting the process or set of properties by which one entity is distinguished from another within a relational field or given conceptual system. With their differences, cities are large, densely populated human settlements, often with a degree of governmental autonomy from the national state. Today there are even mega-cities with populations above twenty million. Istanbul, where I took my flight from, is over 15 million daytime. Citing Michel Foucault[1], James Donald argues that the modern state uses two rationalities in maintaining its power: that of state reason, or governance; and that of policing, which classifies and identifies population. *Donald writes:* 'The population became the target of both surveillance and welfare'[2]. Cities generally comprise a diversity of peoples and cultures, with highly differentiated modes of life between which there often is only the faintest communication, the greatest indifference and the broadest tolerance, occasionally the bitterest strife, but always the sharpest contrast.[3]

Cities, by definition, are spaces of "cultures" and culture in plural means **difference**. Identities are constructed within cultural boundaries. Culture is one of the 'most complicated words in the English language'. Cultural and religious differences define 21st century urban spaces. Culture is where philosophy and practice meet. Philosophy without practice dissolves very easily into air . . practice without philosophy turns into myopic, mindless practicism'.[4] If philosophy were an enterprise of asking questions from birth to death, then we could say, as Jacque Derrida indeed does, that what comes before question is "being". The very sense of "Being" is something that is lost in the hypermodern city**.** Hypermodernity refers to any contemporary social process containing a greater and faster than usual amount and speed of various elements relating to the quality or state of modernity. Differences, cultural or otherwise, become either confrontational or lost in such speed, that is, in the hypermodern condition. Hypermodernity is modernity with excessive speed. I shall come back to that later on.

In the Western philosophy, from Leibniz to Kant, the idea of difference was

addressed in various ways: Leibniz used the indiscernibility of identicals (principium identatis indiscernibilium) and Kant used Leibniz"s principle in an empirical framework in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Much of the philosophical work moved towards structuralist thought in Western academia. Structuralism is a theoretical paradigm in sociology, anthropology, linguistics and semiotics positing that elements of human culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching system or structure. It works to uncover the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel. Yet, French philosopher Jacques Derrida both extended the scope and profoundly criticised the application of structuralist thought to the processes by which meaning is produced through the interplay of difference in language, and in particular, writing. Whereas structuralist linguistics recognizes that meaning is differential, more structuralist thought, such as narratology, becomes too focused on identifying and producing a typology of the fixed differential structures and binary oppositions at work in any given system. In his work, Derrida sought to show how the differences on which any signifying system depends are not fixed, but get caught up and entangled with each other. Writing itself becomes the prototype of this process of entanglement, and in *Of Grammatology* (1967) Derrida coined the term diff?rance (a deliberate misspelling of diff?rence) in order to provide a conceptual hook for his thinking on the meaning processes at work within writing/language. This neologism is a clever play on the two meanings of the French word diff?rer: to **differ** and to **defer**. Derrida thereby argues that meaning does not arise out of fixed differences between static elements in a structure, but that the meanings produced in language and other signifying systems are always partial, provisional and infinitely deferred along a chain of differing/deferring signifiers. In a similar fashion, Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968) was an attempt to think about difference as having an ontological privilege over identity, inverting the traditional relationship between the two concepts and implying that identities are only produced through processes of differentiation. This is also a familiar understanding in the Eastern philosophical traditions. There is more emphasis on "being", that is ontology, in Eastern and Asian philosophy, than on metaphysics. Eastern ontology starts with recognition of diversity and difference.

This is where the contemporary city life becomes a matter of concern. Processes of differentiation in constructing identities require a kind of **philosophy of difference,** as we live in a hypermodern urban space.

I would like to point out that one of the several challenges that the 21st

century presents to our urban condition is the earlier mentioned hypermodernity. Not modernity, not postmodernity but hypermodernity. Hypermodernity is the type of modernity that can be associated with post-secular and post-rational urban life. In hypermodernity, emotions are important. Identities are also influenced by emotions. Contemporary society is becoming more and more hypermodern. We live in a world at risk, as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens claim. In our hypermodern cultures, the latter half of the twentieth century has been described as an age of flux, uncertainty and rapid social change in parallel to the de-sacralisation of everything in hypermodern setting. (Nasr, 1995; Bauman, 1991; Marwick, 1990). When there is deep uncertainty in urban psychology, it means there is also need for a philosophy of difference.

<u>Uncertainty</u> is very much related to the sense of **speed** in history and an unmatched level of relativity in social and political life. **Uncertainty is about having more unknowns in one"s life than "knowns".** 21st century urban space is more and more **multicultural**, **multiethnic** and **multireligious**. In such an urban environment, identity constructions need a certain philosophy. This philosophy can only be a philosophy of difference. Difference and diferance here points at the idea of living together with "others" who are different than us in culture, worldview and religion. This is where I would like to go a little deeper into the idea of **speed** as speed makes a fundamental impact on our urban lives. Virilio argues that what makes the city "panic" is the fact that technological progress and virtual reality go faster than political reality, and out of political control.

When we speak about speed, we encounter with the question of "**relativity**" in human life. As Paul Virilio argues in his "dromology", we live in a society of SPEED and ACCELERATION. Virilio emphasizes the importance of speed in history, and thereby of acceleration[5], which is also related to speed. According to Virilio, we have become de-territorialized. We're all going through the gates of relativity. We live it through mobile phones, "live" programmes on TV, telecommunications media, Virtual Reality (VR), cyberspace, video-conferencing, supersonic air travel and so on. We do that through our calendar, time planning, relationships, or even involvement in love affairs. We do that through phone conversations, education, and "tele-learning". This is how we live "relativity" and have therefore been de-territorialized.

I quote Paul Virilio here: "...what remains in order to interpret our world? Nothing but relativity! Not the physicists" relativity, but our relativity, the relativity of our own lived lives, for which we are responsible, and of which we are the victims, at the same time. Relativity is no longer the exclusive domain of (natural) scientists, it has become the property of all those who live in the

modern world." [6]

According to Virilio's *The Information Bomb* we are under the influence of digitised information and communication so much that our identities are torn into pieces. We are in-between ideas and positions all the time. According to Armitage, current **hypermodern and globalitarian hypermodern(organ)ization are not merely technological but** <u>also social and cultural in character</u>. **Hypermodernity lies in the realm of the 'in-between'. The in-betweennessprovides a mental confusion with regard to life**. **Those who live in hypermodern cities are fearful and confused about their future.** This hypermodern analysis is centred on the '**uncertainty principle**' that connects 'dromology', or the logic of speed, to the intensification and complex networking of contemporary organizations and institutions. The hypermodern city is a city of risks, depression and frustration. The reason is what Virilio calls "**technological fundamentalism**".

Under the pressure of this urban technological fundamentalism in the setting of cultural and religious diversity/plurality, we can understand that, city also provides a basis for philosophy to be born and shaped as well as for our ethical choices to be made. In order to allow a philosophy of difference to be born, what we need is "**reflexivity**", the practical wisdom that is lost in the hypermodern virtual reality. It is through the sense of reflexivity that we can develop a philosophy of differences. **What is reflexivity?**

We can trace the idea of reflexivity all the way back to the Aristotelian concept of "**phronesis**" (practical wisdom through VIRTUE by leaders of the "city" and the "state"), which he used in his Nicomachean Ethics. The notion was later developed in a more hermeneutical discussion by al-Farabi in his al-Madina al-Fadila/The Virtuous City (or state) and al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah / The Political Regime.

In order to understand the idea of reflexivity, we need to understand the idea of reflexive modernity. The earlier mentioned German social philosopher Ulrich Beck believes industrial modernity has reached its limits and is undergoing a period of transformation, moving irreversibly to a new historical epoch which he labels as "**reflexive modernity**." Beck, while not the originator of the term 'reflexive modernisation', has used it extensively in his writings and has been one of the leading exponents of its use. The idea of reflexive modernisation describes, at its simplest, the notion that we are moving into a third stage of social development within modernity.

Beck has subtitled his influential book ***Risk Society*** 'towards a new modernity', which Paul Virilio defined as **hypermodernity**. Basically what Beck says is that modernity becomes reflexive, 'a theme and a problem for itself'. This "new modernity", that is, Virilio"s hypermodernity, has

— to solve the human-constructed problems which arise from the development of industrial society;

— to tackle how the risks produced as a consequence of modernity can be eprevented, minimised, dramatised, or channelled f.

And this is what makes it "reflexive". **For the purposes of this paper reflexivity is taken to be a deeper and broader dimension of reflection. It is essentially a conscious attitude of "self critique and personal quest". Self-critique and personal quest is possible within a philosophy of difference, which is the basis of the ontological recognition of "differences" and "otherness".**

How can we be reflexive enough? If we listen to Virilio,

*"I feel we have indeed tended to forget everything that's **invisible**..... In the past, the invisible was present through religion and mythologies. The invisible world was an important element of reality. With the onset of materialism, of the Age of Enlightenment, of the political history of the nineteenth century, the Invisible was, I would say, censored. It signified the old customs; it was an archaic vision. **The visible and the material were privileged to the detriment of the invisible, as the deeds of society are not all visible.**"* [7]

Elsewhere, Virilio also says,

"One cannot come to grips with the phenomenon of cyberspace without some inkling of, or some respect for, metaphysical intelligence!" [8]

This metaphysical intelligence that Virilio is referring to is what this paper calls "philosophy of differences". A city can be a city of happiness if there is enough reflexivity, and metaphysical intelligence, that is, if it is sensitive about cultural, ethnic, and religious differences among its residents.

I can hear the question that persists here; What is then philosophy of difference in the urban context?

This presentation proposes that the "urban philosophy of difference" should be based on the already mentioned Aristotelian notion of phronesis and al-Farabi"s notion of al-Madina al-Fadhila. Phronesis, the practical wisdom of Aristotelian philosophy, interpreted as "al-hikmah al-amaliyyah" by Muslim philosophers, is concerned with the particulars of the city (*Ethika Nikomacheia*, VI.8.1141b20-30).

According to Aristotle, phronesis is a **reasoned capacity** to work toward human ends in life (ibid., VI.5.1140b20). If a society/a city started "lacking reasoned capacity", "aql and irfan", we would end up living with less or no happiness. Both intellectual and moral virtues are involved in a happy life. In order to attain the knowledge of this happiness, practical wisdom is necessary (ibid., VI.13.1144b30).

This is exactly what Farabi spoke of too. And today Ulrich Beck and Charles

Taylor knowingly or unknowingly continue arguing for the same practical wisdom through the idea of reflexivity. Merging Plato"s "Republic" with Aristotle"s "Polis", 1000 years ago Farabi spoke of a **lack of "aql"/reasoned capacity,** which is exactly what Ulrich Beck says today: there is not enough reason and practical wisdom in the city. Cities thus become "ignorant cities", despite the information technology, or as Paul Virilio says, technological fundamentalism.

According to Farabi, lack of enough "reasoned capacity" creates a society of JAHILIYYAH / ignorance. Lack of "reasoned capcaity"means lack of reflexivity. Reflexivity is necessary for an urban society with more happiness and less fear of risks.[9] This is what **Descartes** (in *Discourse on the Method* and in *Meditations on First Philosophy*) was also talking about when he banished ignorance; he also discarded awareness of ignorance. We do not know if Descartes ever read al-Farabi"s "Virtous City" (al-Madina al-Fadila) or "Politics of the City" (as-Siyasat al-Madaniyyah), but we do know that Farabi, presented us the dangers of risk in the city when he spoke about "**ignorance**" **of the city**, and also about "**ignorant cities**" long before Descartes.

According to al-Farabi, there are ignorant cities. The ignorant city misses the right path through faulty judgment**. The ignorant city is the city whose inhabitants do not know true happiness and the thought of it never occurs to them.** Happiness for them is the total of bodily health, wealth, enjoyment of pleasures, freedom to follow one's desires and being held in honour and esteem. This is also what Paul Virilio, Ulrich Beck, Charles Taylor and others point at. What Paul Virilio calls technological fundamentalism is perhaps the leading source of the lack of happiness in the city.

For Al-Farabi, happiness is the highest degree of human perfection. Once we attain happiness, we are in need of nothing else to accompany it. Just like the rank, happiness is the preferred good, the greatest and the most perfect end that man has ever desired.[10] Al-Farabi's conclusion was that, we attain happiness only when we come to possess the noble dispositions through the discipline of philosophy; and **philosophy comes about through excellent discernment**; and excellent discernment comes about through potentiality of the mind to perceive what is correct; and the potentiality of the mind belongs to us prior to all of this.[11] Al-Farabi emphasized that it is only through a city that a person achieves happiness. This is through actions which requires the use of the body and senses; through accidents of the soul such as appetite, pleasure, joy, anger, fear, desire, mercy, jealousy and other feelings; and through discernment by use of the mind.[12]

At the end of the day, all what al-Farabi talks about is a balance between "being happy" and "making happy". "**Being happy" is about "*tahseel as-***

saadat "(obtaining happiness - is "aad) for yourself whereas "*making happy* "(ta "seed) is related to "as-siyasa al-madaniyyah", that is, city politics based on metaphysical intelligence and philosophy of difference.

Conclusion

There is no conclusion. It is a thought in process I wanted to share with you. Cities are "threshold"s for challenges. Threshold means "a point of entry or something which marks the start or end of something". Our biggest challenge in cities is to make our cities thresholds/centres of wisdom and happiness through education and moral decision-making processes based on a philosophy of difference and reflexivity. We need to bring ethics and wisdom back into our Urban Space. What we need then is a Sophia-polis / City of Wisdom / real City, not a Techno-polis only. As Paul Virilio says, we need metaphysical intelligence for happy cities, that is what this paper calls "philosophy/ethics of differences". A city can be a city of happiness, in the sense al-Farabi elaborated, if there is enough reflexivity, and metaphysical intelligence, that is, if it is sensitive about cultural, ethnic, and religious differences among its residents.

Footnotes

[1]Foucault, M. (1988) Politics, Philosophy, Culture, ed. L. D. Kritzman, London, Routledge, p. 67.

[2]Donald, J. (1999) Imagining the Modern City, London, Athlone, p. 32.

[3]Wirth, L. (2003) 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', in LeGates and Stout (2003), The City Reader, 3rd edition, London, Routledge, pp. 98–105 [first published in American Journal of Sociology, XLIV, 1 (July, 1938)], p. 102.

[4] Fischer, E. (1973) Marx in His Own Words, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p.157.
[5]Virilio, P. (2007) Speed and Politics, Los Angeles, p. 8.

[6] Armitage, J. From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond, An Interview with Paul Virilio, http://www.kyoolee.net/From_Modernism_to_Hypermodernism_and_Beyond_-_Interview_with_Paul_Virilio.pdf.

[7]Armitage, J. Ibid., p.36.

[8]Armitage, J. Ibid., p. 79.

[9]Farabi, Abu Nasr (1985) On the Perfect State of Al-Farabi, trans. Richard Walzer, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[10]Farabi, Abu Nasr (2007) Directing Attention to the Way to Happiness, Classical Arabic Philosophy, in: An Anthology of Sources, trans. Jon McGinnis, David C. Resiman. USA: Hackett Publishing Company, pp. 104-105.

[11]Farabi, Abu Nasr (2007), Ibid., pp.105-106.

[12] Farabi, Abu Nasr (2007), Ibid., p. 105.

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Бюлент Шене

ФІЛОСОФІЯ ВІДМІННОСТІ, ГІПЕРМОДЕРН, І МІСТО «ЩАСТЯ» В «АЛЬ-МАДІНА АЛЬ-ФАДХІЛА» АЛЬ-ФАРАБІ

У промові розглядаються три концепти – філософія відмінності, гіпермодерн і місто щастя. Найбільша увага приділяється міському просторові 21-го століття як мультикультурному, мультиетнічному і мультиконфессіональному. Автор приходить до висновку, що, ґрунтуючись на добротній освіті, толерантному ставленню до інших культур і філософії відмінності, ми повинні зробити наші міста центрами мудрості і щастя.

Бюлент Шене

ФИЛОСОФИЯ РАЗЛИЧИЯ, ГИПЕРМОДЕРН, И ГОРОД «СЧАСТЬЯ» В «АЛЬ-МАДИНА АЛЬ-ФАДХИЛА» АЛЬ-ФАРАБИ

В тексте рассматриваются три концепта – философия различия, гипермодерн и город счастья. Наибольшее внимание уделяется городскому пространству 21-го века как мультикультурному, мультиэтническому и мультиконфессиональному. Автор приходит к выводу, что, основываясь на доброкачественном образовании, толерантном отношении к другим культурам и философии различия, мы должны сделать наши города центрами мудрости и счастья.

Олена Білянська

«МАШИНО-ЛЮДСТВО» ЯК ФОРМА УРБАНІЗАЦІЇ У КОНЦЕПЦІЇ М. БЕРДЯЄВА

У статті аналізується проблема зростання впливу машини та техніки на суспільство та людину. Виникає нова форма організації простору, яку М. Бердяєв називає «автомато-людство» або «машино-людство». Філософ наголошує на тому, що загроза механізації, автоматизму є великою небезпекою, котру зазнає людина. Разом із машинізацією суспільства та життя починає змінюватися й сама людина. Вона вже не уявляє себе без технічних приладів, чітко сконструйованого способу життя та побудови соціокультурного простору. Знаходячись у межах міста, людина відчуває себе залежною від нього, людина вкорінюється у ритм життя міста та починає змінюватися й сама. Таким чином, формується та відбувається криза у свідомості людини.

На порозі ХХІ ст. філософський погляд на людину набуває нового сенсу. Людина знаходиться в центрі глобальних проблем сучасності, війн, культурних надбань, суспільних відносин. З приводу цього є дуже важливим аргументовано визначити сенс та перспективи доцільності існування людини. В зв'язку з цим, звернення до проблеми машинізації, технізації суспільства в сучасних умовах має гостро злободенний характер і вводить в поле ключових сторін суспільної діяльності. Воно має актуальність в плані розгляду та вирішення завдань подолання явищ відчуження в сучасному українському суспільстві, які існують та проявляються як в соціально-духовній сфері існування людини, так і в сфері сучасних економічних процесів.

Саме тому, погляди М. Бердяєва є актуальними з огляду сучасних теоретичних і практичних проблем суспільного розвитку України і світової соціальної динаміки.

Витоки проблеми машинізації, технізації суспільства полягали у тій конкретній історичній ситуації, яка склалася на початку ХХ століття. Сучасне мислителю людство в своєму розвитку зайшло в глухий кут: ні природа, ні суспільство самі по собі вже не здатні були його захистити, природні ресурси вичерпувалися, сама природа руйнувалася під тиском індустріалізму; виявило межі свого ефективного функціонування суспільство, яке відчувало величезні труднощі у інтеграції своїх надто розрізнених складових.

У життя світу переможно увійшла машина, назавжди порушивши