

Music and Transmodernity part 1

The Short story: This particular treatment of Transmodernity views Modernity as presently constituted as being let us say 'not freedom enhancing'.

- Genre is not a set of rules
- Avant garde is rejected/ elitist
- Virtuosity is irrelevant/ elitist
- Production/consumption division of labour/for whose benefit?
- Modernity's subjects as dis-encharmed creatures/just plain wrong
- Modernity is a form of Enchantment
- Romanticism is a reaction against, but also a failed project of, Modernity
- European Modernity is just that i.e. European
- Contemporary Songs have a status hierarchy that reflects Modernity's ills

Transmodernity is

- A place to interrogate modernity
 - A re-examination of modernity and European dominance
 - A re-assessment of the nature and role of Islam
 - A discussion that anyone can have not just academics
 - A perspective to re-order Modernity
 - A return to story rather than obsession with abstraction/sink into context
 - A logic of re-assignment and revolt
 - A new looking glass to condemn Capitalism
 - A re-assessment of what 'the Arts' actually means
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The Longer Story

Let's clear some confusions out of the way to begin with

Generally, in conversation the terms Modernity; Modernism; and Modernisation have some relationship to one another but they are regarded in general discussion as distinct and separate. **Modernism** is by and large an art movement, **modernisation** is about the Institutions of Political Economy and **Modernity** is the culture that we live with and within, hundreds of years old. We can argue for a long time about the nuances and definitions about the three but let's just leave it at that; they are generally distinct in conversations and discussions.

Transmodernity is not a project and cannot be so unless it ends up losing 'trans' so it cannot issue a manifesto. Sometimes seen as being in a sequence (Modernity, Postmodernism and then Transmodernity, Marxists use thesis, antithesis and whatever adds up to both plus something else still others use 'second modernity' but that sounds like more Modernity and less Trans) but the best way of regarding it is, as a set of discussions about Modernity and its roots and especially its European variant. Not really a critique but sometimes regarded as that, sometimes seen as a historical era (our own in the 21st century), sometimes seen as being coined by someone or other (wiki it and see) and with the suggestion that whoever coined it, owns it, defines it, controls it, polices it and grants them a special licence over it, will bring the discussion to a halt; so it's their private little domain then? Presumably.

The vocabulary of Transmodernity is important because it must be capable of being understood in fairly general terms without requiring a large amount of academic training or highly specialised terms. Once you make it (the discussion) a kind of specialism with technical terms it begins to look very much like classic Modernity and especially Positivism. If Transmodernity is to be in any way a liberating or enlightening point of view it's difficult to see how that can be if the terms of the debate are not clear without a 'special licence' that is, without a specific knowledge that may be difficult to acquire or that has a particular status (e.g. European education only). Once you introduce a 'special licence' or make it the province of 'gatekeepers' with their own agenda then it ceases to be relevant. Access has to be an issue and the investment to access must not be prohibitively expensive, e.g. a graduate education. It's a bit like Habermas' Ideal Speech Situation that is restricted access has to be an issue.

Sociologists and others have a kind of shorthand with which they talk to each other but once that shorthand becomes 'the **general** terms of the discussion' then the discussion is lost because it becomes the province of a specialised group. That is the way of elitism, hegemony (Marxist word roughly meaning pervasive spread of power and dominance, like the weather only ideas) control etc. Transmodernity cannot be a specialism or an inflation of talk, it cannot be owned by a group who appears to have authority over it. Once that happens then you are back to Modernity and you just lost the Trans-'mission' of ideas. It is useful and quicker to communicate using a kind of shorthand - technical terms that communicate quickly - but it is a question of context, such a shorthand cannot be used to exclude others from the discussion otherwise you just lost the plot.

For some it is purely the province of academics and anyone without an academic post (or wanting one), or a Phd (2 would be better) is not allowed to even mention it, let alone discuss it. If they make their living doing it then they don't want to do it for free. For those discussing it are keen to have a set of rules which enfranchise their discussion of it so, if you break those rules (their rules) then you are simply in error and you should shut up. They will quote at you various experts (itself a topic of debate and expertise in itself is a point of issue) some dead some still living to support the rules. Another context of it is Tourism theory because geographers get into transmodernity bigtime so they see it as only about the discipline of geography (so be careful of their videos on Utube etc.)

Well in the end you can choose but you are going to annoy someone if you discuss it, but just accept that and live on and possibly defend your ability to discuss it by referencing its critical importance. That is not the end of it for your discussion of Transmodernity is affected by who you are in terms of being from a northern hemisphere country which then privileges your authority claims. Southern hemisphere countries have always been at a disadvantage from the modernity of the north for it is their version (the north's) of modernity that has been imposed so when they speak of modernity they expect their views to be superior in some sense; i.e. more right, intrinsically good. Much discussion is about the roots of European Modernity and the invasion of America, note the word invasion not discovery. If you are from a northern hemisphere country you tend to view it as discovery and if from the southern half, invasion is a sometimes default position; you can reject the North's use of 'discovery' if you want to show a little solidarity with the Southern neighbours.

A few more things to note for now, is that Modernity has some very important views that colour all discussions of it. Firstly Modernity projects itself as universal, applying to the whole universe not just a few countries with electricity and frozen fish fingers. Whatever it

puts forward is subject to that universalism. That being the case all the other things are seen to be 'non projects' for Modernity is also exclusive and rejects anything that seems to lie outside of it. Having said that Modernity actually relies on a category called 'outsider' in order to move things 'forward' (that's a spatial metaphor btw). We will come across this outsider idea again later on. Furthermore Modernity likes abstraction and does not have a very sophisticated view of human beings viewing them as cyphers in a technical game called 'The Theory of Everything' though not to be conflated with Positivism yet is probably that at some point.

Modernity projects that its subjects, are the first disenchanting creatures in the universe that is, those subjects do not require stories outside of Modernity to inform the answer to the question 'what is a life?' 'what does it mean?' So narratives like religion, ancient philosophies, myths, fables, Folk tales, Tribal tradition, magic etc. that potentially could do that are not rejected but filtered through the need to support Modernity (though ultimately rejected if they get pushy). Some have argued for a re-enchantment others argue that Modernity is itself a form of enchantment. What we mean (and there is discussion) by enchantment is the ability of something (and something in you) to generate a story with a clear relationship to a lifeworld. You see the element and your mind generates an entire story with you (or a placeholder of you) in it but it seems to have a kind of gravitational pull somehow that makes you want to explore it; it seems to invite exploration. You are magically taken with it, but also it creates for you an entire world to live in that you don't locate in some other world - exclusivity. That is potentially related to the process of Conceptual Blending a consequence of the way humans think.

One of the discussions in Transmodernity is about the history of Modernity in particular viewing the renaissance as being 'early modernity'. In addition another theme is the idea of revisiting Modernity to look at how it went wrong with presumably a plan to put it right by having a kind of Modernity-lite, ratcheting down some of its worst excesses; how that would be done and who does it, is another matter. These discussions however are very important because if you want to do anything about it you have to dig into the roots of it and see why it went wrong and why the promises of Modernity have not arrived on our doorstep just yet. In many ways Modernity is a 'promise-paradigm' that is it wants a **point of arrival** to keep you going but no point of arrival can ever happen because of its tenet of progress and perfection; one day, some day, never. If you posed the question to Modernity as to when the perfection or progress is no longer required then you would not get an answer. Progress is unending and perfection is a process not an event so in essence then Modernity never has to deliver anything it only has to promise.

One of the problems of discussing the history of Modernity is the primacy (let's put it that way for now) of the Islamic world. Islam is extremely important in the history of Modernity and obviously there are those in the West for whom that view would be rejected for to admit it, might mean a 're-adjustment' of the current privileges they enjoy. You can see how Transmodernity discussions can get very political. Capitalism is another topic within Transmodernity; by and large some belief that Capitalism is or also is, a theory of Human Nature (and 'Nature' and 'Human Nature' are themselves dodgy points of view), others that it is a theory of political economy, others just don't like it, -eos- (end of story). Capitalism could be seen also as a 'user' of Modernity, colouring it in like some demented child of history.

Another theme in the discussions is Positivism and how it got itself entrenched given that it is pretty much an all pervasive view. Much of Sociology is about the critique of positivism (let us say 'hard science' for now) which sounds 'positive' but be advised to take three

steps back for one of the problems is the way that in European Modernity it is applied to human beings as if they are things and if your demeanor is critical then that means 'unreasonably applied'. Now that modernity has science (hard and very tightly defined), so it goes, it does not require any other narrative to make sense of the world; a theory of everything means everything and that is also how you think. as well in the broader discussions of definitions.

Modernity also values certain things and has certain ideas that are central to it. The idea of Progress, the idea of Perfection, the idea of the individual, a central narrative that is utopian etc. We grow up in it, we don't always see the flaws, they appear to us to be entirely natural even part of nature which we see as unchanging. If we dare debate with some people it will attract the kind of criticism that is reserved for lunatics or dangerous extremists. Here's the pitch; if you are perfectly happy not knowing then pass on, some of us malcontents are not very happy and so we are told to 'get a life' but we want to know. If we are going wrong in our thinking we are absolutely sure that some kind person will let us know, but please don't kill us.

Another thing before we move on, Modernity views the the individual subject as being at the heart of everything. Some people see the individual subject as a somewhat artificial construction. This brings into play arguments about Conceptual Blending (sometimes called Conceptual Integration) which is a paradigm (a theoretical framework for other theories etc.) in cognitive science fairly new (mid 1990s) which tends to redefine what is meant by a thinking human being. Related to this is the thorny issue of the Transcendental and how Modernity views that. Still further the Marxist view of, let us say, a 'conscious nature' words like ontology spring up, a sort of singular 'being-ness' (deep down the 'you' is a piece of grit (grit theory - Marxists and some non Marxists don't believe in that) that cannot be further divided or analysed) but in the Marxist case the terms are 'species being' that is that you may have a kind of consciousness that is not a 'social being-ness' and that is related to you as a physical animal. A specific bit of Marxist text is also involved in that discussion i.e. the 6th thesis of Fierbach. Conceptual Blending on the other hand has a whole view of the construction of 'you' and how 'you' are doing it to produce 'you'.

There are also projects like the 'blue brain' project which seeks to create a synthetic brain and other projects which are trying to create a way of 'downloading' a brain in to some kind of digital format; so called live forever 'mind uploading' to your new clone (film relevant here is Surrogates). Be mindful however that the project of Artificial Intelligence has monumentally failed mostly because of an assumption made at the start of the AI stuff that the Mind worked like a computer and this is not the case and as a result AI did not come up with the kind of 'progress' that was expected and promised. All of these issues are related to Modernity's obsession with the human being as a purely abstract notion and the perfectability of that creature.

Why does this have anything to do with the Arts and Music in particular? Well the Arts and Music are communication codes that tell us potentially who we might be or what we might be and what that means, and Modernity's version of the arts is a nice little friend as long as they are under the influence. Modernity's helpers also usually have some better status unless they get out of hand in which case they are one hit wonders. Remember Music might be just entertainment to you but it is also a code of communication; there are messages that it delivers not just explicitly but by its structures.

At the moment all kinds of Artists including poets, writers, lyricists, composers, painters etc. are starting to be recruited into the emerging virtual reality industry (which will be

linked to drones and expert systems) to program those devices due to AI failing dismally. That is, AI's concept of a human being is too poor to produce much in the way of feasible results. Music is part of the lifeworld of most people and so the music that you produce will have a role to play within that technology and the discussions as to what exactly is a human being and how is that creature to be regarded will inevitably produce questions about the role of music. One of the biggest problems is asking the question 'what is music?' and there are some who see the answer as more sociological than musical and that Schoenberg and his ilk were simply juggling Modernity balls in the air. Rearranging the deck chairs on a perpetually sinking ship but that hasn't sunk yet.

Well this recruitment is more related to Capitalism's new long wave of profitable activity because the technology needs it and so 'the Arts' which has belonged in European Modernity to the Middle Classes is now being absorbed into the Means of Production much more robustly than ever before. That is, 'the Arts' is the means of production and has the same relationship to manufacturing as agriculture had to manufacturing (with apologies to the Physiocrats who had a particular view of the relationship) so Capitalism begins to 'milk the cultural stories' since those stories are the new machines, and to construct the factories for the machines cities are being remodelled; they are the new factories. The 'Arts system' which includes the Middle Classes has in Modernity been a kind of 'deal' (another discussion, another time) where the Arts franchise has retained its class identity (i.e. Middle), its integration into the means of production more substantially requires a proletarianisation (a drop in wages and a lot more of less besides) of the producing population; Capitalism needs to get it on the cheap. So there is a new elitism on its way. What does Trans-Modernity have to say about this? Norralot.

Is Transmodernity important? Well if you want to answer the question 'what is a life' it certainly is but it tends to touch on every aspect of our lives (like Modernity) so I guess the answer is yes it is important. One of the biggest problems about discussing it is that people are not very critical (in the sense of exacting, precise) about Modernity, but be assured once you enter in to discussions about Transmodernity you discover the debate and how central it is to the world. One of the best ways to approach Transmodernity is to try and think how different the medieval world is from the Modern world. If you take a range of fundamental topics and ask what the difference is between those two, then it prompts the question, how different Modernity may be from Transmodernity.

One last thing, we are not against Modernity in its entirety for it brought with it many things we want and we enjoy and the Mediaeval world was somewhat nasty. There are things we don't like, some of us feel that the way things are playing out is not good and Modernity and in particular European Modernity is responsible for that. We do not want to chuck the baby out with the bathwater but something has to happen with the bathwater. For example we have a problem with its historical assumption of colonialism which seems to be quite intact given the propensity to invade other people's spaces. So we can keep quite a lot of things, t-shirts, the vote, electricity, ipods, electric guitars, fish fingers, etc.

In some ways Transmodernity is a kind of escape pod from the illusions of Modernity. **You have to view Modernity from somewhere else** as otherwise you are expecting Modernity to self reflect and it doesn't do that. That is, it is fanciful to think that you are a 'free thinking' entity and that you think outside of Modernity **while you are in it**; how could that work? That being in it doesn't affect your ability to think outside it? Modernity is a little more grasping of you than that. You have to move to a position which removes you from some of Modernity's central tenets. We are all in the grip but somehow we have to explicitly remove certain hooks to move around.

Postmodernism threatened somewhere to go that could enable this but was simply a crass, nihilistic reaction in which everything had validity (and that means some pretty vile things), you could not say anything about anything, it accepted and rejected everything and supported nothing. It was like Feyerabend's view in 'Against Method' there is no method but whatever you do, can make theory better; How? No matter what happens it is better, ...ok better than what? Postmodernism was maybe a good phase to go through but you wouldn't end up anywhere that was in any way more enlightening than you were before but you did understand that where you were was not where you wanted to be in more precise terms. Ok I guess there is some virtue in knowing how bad it is in slightly more detail.

Postmodernism was useful to reveal some of Modernity's weaknesses but that doesn't mean that it 'led to' Transmodernity it did not. This discussion is not axiomatically built (Transmodernity based on and in turn...Postmodernism based on and in turn...) etc. it is just a point of view from which we can discuss Modernity from a particular vantage point that does not subsume us within Modernity's exclusivity (and that exclusivity is a hard-line brick wall, no negotiation). Transmodernity is a kind of sideways move and not linear either a kind of liquid 3d chess with a revolving board played with Modernity and you have to be that devious. However we do have to move to a position in the discussion where we question and potentially reject certain things in European Modernity (colonialism for a start which was built in to Modernity at the very beginning).

The notion of story comes up eventually because all stories are filtered through our dominant culture (and that is Modernity) and it is how we understand the world. There are narratives and there is grand narrative (global theories are for example some kind of grand narrative a story inviting you to believe in it and locate other stories-narratives) which was rejected by Postmodernism as naive. So in essence we would need to ask what is the basis of story, how does the something that underlies it work? What is the story muse? Whose Muse is it? Is Modernity controlling that Muse? Can we meditate on the Muse of the nature of Story without falling into Modernity's little steel traps? Those steel traps are like the Hypercube in Cube2, you find a door but that leads to a place that looks awfully like the place you are just leaving and you potentially fall into it cos it's the other round and upsidedown depending on where you entered into it.

Modernity's stories of exclusiveness, universality, abstraction, the individual, it's version of what counts as knowledge (big word technical term 'epistemology') etc. Once you are in it the doorway out seems not quite as simple so where is the doorway by which you could discuss Modernity with any meaning? As long as you are in it how do you know that it is not pulling your strings, are you 'being played'? Transmodernity is a place (spatial metaphor) to go that will not tolerate Modernity's nonsense to put it bluntly, and we are being blunt most of the time here, if this was a more 'academic' thing then it would be considerably more nuanced, that is we would dance around a little bit more with qualifying statements etc. So there is a longer longer story but we don't have room for that right now, so all this sounds a little...blunt.

One last, last thing and that is 'Critical theory' which is a branch of Social Theory that has a particular significance. Knowing it (a particular theory which is of a critical type), changes your point of view quite fundamentally to the extent that it is 'liberating' that is, it doesn't just change your point of view like your opinion or something. Your entire lifeworld just entered a completely different set of rules in which you see your place in that lifeworld as being somewhere else. Marxist theory is a type of Critical Theory, since your social class

position and your view of Capitalism would alter substantially depending on your reading of it given your sense of your Class position.

Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis is for example a critical theory, by going to analysis, you eventually found out that your dog was in love with itself, and your father was in love with your aunt, and your mother wanted to kill your dog, which is why you hated her, and so knowing that (and working through the emotions of it) means you no longer hate your mother and now you couldn't care less about the fate of your dog, meanwhile your mother has disowned you; you know.... that sort of story.

It is difficult to see how Trans-modernity could be a critical theory, but I guess that might be a discussion somewhere primarily because Modernity is so all encompassing and so pervasive, it can literally create your entire world and give it a set of rules; for example an allegory of this is like The Matrix, how would you get out? The Matrix solves this by creating a convenient external agency (without a socket in the back of their head, surely an Agent Smith mistake) and putting forward a sort of technological Christ (Neo he is the one, Modernity loves the heroic individual) to vanquish the Agent Smiths and that is a Modernity cop-out. That is, a superior technocrat -Modernity's numero uno, comes alive through some techy drug (red pill, blue pill) plus a few folk tale elements (strange feminist granny figure, lock'smith' logicians, saviour claptrap etc.) to sweeten it up so you don't spot Modernity's little algos (algorithmic somethings); sorry it doesn't wash.

What you need is a more robust version of what a human being is and how they think their way out of the paper bag of Modernity which they do, though it is not easy. Let's face it Modernity has not produced a story (a version) of a human being that would do that. All Romanticism did was to pick up elements from the middle ages and implant them into Victoriana, the individual hero in history, emotional pathos etc. Even the middle ages got their stuff from the Greeks. Hardly a more robust version of human.

Transmodernity is not without its critics and not without criticism. The terms we are searching for might be rather Marxist but nevertheless they are relevant 'Logic of Revolt'. If we are unhappy about Modernity and we wish to do something about it what is the process of that? Is it just a bunch of people keeping some council of despair, or marking the score card of decline and misery? Does Transmodernity lead us somewhere and suggest some route by which it can all change; so far,...no.

However, one of the latest ideas in Marxism is that revolt or revolution as generally defined and enacted historically, i.e. long march, storm some important symbolic building, shoot a few people at the top, is not the way that you necessarily move from one system to another especially as we don't want to get rid of Modernity as a whole. Capitalism might be subject to such historical and revolutionary activity but Modernity is a different kettle of fish. What we are concerned with is how European Modernity is failing and how you would do something about that? Where would you start? What arguments would you use and what would you specifically do? In the case of the Mediaeval world to the Capitalist world the early Capitalists engaged in an activity which to the Mediaeval world was irrelevant.

So the logic of revolt was not simply a war, or revolution in the classical sense (storm winter palace etc.) but a getting on with some totally different agenda. Even if you had a Marxist revolution and 'overthrew' Capitalism you are still left with the problems of European Modernity and its ills. Capitalism may well make use of the Modernity monsters to wrestle with its problem of falling profit and legitimation crises (well done Habermas), but nevertheless once that has gone you are still left with European Modernity. There are

socialists and Marxists out there for whom the Monsters of Modernity are like the Civil Service; neutral.

So in fact the idea of Transmodernity requiring a logic of revolt in the classical sense might be only partially right, yes protest at the failings and corruption of European Modernity but also craft out some other agenda, engage in other different activities may also be part of the solution. One last thing; the people who discuss this stuff are already the privileged cos it's mostly those with a decent education so if they are an elite (by virtue of educational 'achievement') they might be just trying to stitch things up for their little club unless of course the discussion is made a little more accessible...hmmm. Given that many of them do not want their discussions to be made more accessible except to the club you have to ask if they are really discussing Transmodernity at all, or simply hatching a Modernity plot to re-enfranchise their positions; ah-ah we get it.

Finally (good grief!) there is a trendy term called 'Dialectic' and this is a view that there is a process at work and that Modernity has that process in it. This term 'dialectic' tends to place people who use it in the Marxist camp since it is Hegel the philosopher who tended to write most about it. However, there are some (right here in fact) who do not believe that Modernity has such a process in it and that view has consequences. Let us now stop there.

You can see from all this that there is a substantial discussion going on in certain places (and for one reason and another the Spanish speaking world has a lot of people doing it they are **mostly** from the Southern Hemisphere countries) which is quite involved and takes a certain amount of reading just to get on to the first rung which is why it tends to be the province of academics and is not discussed in the tabloids or on twitter. The purpose here is to show the range and sort of topics that are discussed. Be under no illusions however, much of what you are seeing in the news is Modernity's little monsters and angels being played out for better or for worse. What has your music got to say about that? Nothing? Fine, go back to European Modernity and live happily ever after if you can.

A last note on Music and the Transmodern

There is no such thing as Transmodern Music. There are transmodern tendencies in society and so thus in music, and we want to draw attention to these and explain why we think they are transmodern. 'Transmodern music', - that is using Transmodern approaches to create music - is designed (not composed) to sink into its context and undermine certain features of Modernity.

Modernity tends to want Artistic activity in an abstract context (a studio, a workshop, an academy, a venue) whereas Transmodernity would seek to place any artistic activity within a different context where other activities live. So what you do is to place your creativity inside the cultural muse of story rather than Modernity's neat division of labour where it is a separate thing. In Modernity there is a cadre of people who farm the culture of the ordinary to create their culture of special transferring it to an abstract sphere. The definition of artist falls on you whether you like or not because then you can be shunted into a different sphere which is nice and safe for Modernity.

We shall continue to examine part 2 whether music still exists; it might not.

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