To Be Or Not To Be Modern?[1]

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Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! …I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. *Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with you foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?*[2]

1. Introduction: Sketching the Scenario and Situating the Ethical Dilemma

Africa is a continent in transition, a melting-pot of cultural diversity and constant social, political and economic changes. Africa can be conceived of as a *heterotopia* – a heterotopia par excellence. The heterotopia is, after all, the site of violence and transgression where disparate elements can coexist as difference.[3] According to Foucault, the heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are, in themselves, incompatible.[4] It is a site where we can speak of the possibility of the impossibility of convergence, because a confrontation with the other necessarily means being violated. The mere awareness of the other is a violation of its alterity. And Africa has been violated. Even as we write on Africa now – as Europeans - Africa is *being* violated (and, as in the above quotation taken from Rushdie's *Shame,* we are reminded of our disputable ability to speak at all…) But before we address the ethical dilemma at the heart of this paper, we should first attempt to construct an image of post-colonial Africa today.

1.1. Today: Envisioning an "African Renaissance"

The stage is set by the South African president, Thabo Mbeki's briefing on the implementation of the *Millennium Africa Renaissance Programme* (MAP) at the World Economic Forum held on the 28th of January, 2001: According to him, "MAP is a declaration of a firm commitment by African leaders to take ownership and responsibility for the sustainable *economic* development of the continent." Furthermore, MAP's starting point is a critical examination of *Africa's post independence experience* and acceptance that things have to be done *differently* to achieve meaningful socio-economic progress. Accordingly, this programme contains a vision for the *redevelopment* of Africa. These development projects are going to be negotiated with their partners in Africa *as well as* with the rest of the world. This partnership with the rest of the world is presented as a crucial prerequisite, especially

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[2] Rushdie, S. (1984). *Shame.* New York: Vintage Books, p. 23. This is a dialogue across the internal divide which seperates the post-colonised from the post-colonisers.
[3] Cf. Foucault, M. (1967c). "Different spaces", R. Hurley, trans., in Faubion, J. D. (Ed.)(1998). *Michel Foucault. Aesthetics, method and epistemology*, R. Hurley et al. trans., New York: The New Press. This lecture was presented to the Architectural Studies Circle on 14 Maart 1967.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 181.

developed countries, multilateral institutions and (global and national) private sector players are to be addressed. They have already, according to Mbeki, engaged Western political leaders and they feel confident with regards to their goodwill and commitment to this programme which primarily aim at countering the *erroneous legacy of Afro-pessimism*. Furthermore, MAP proposes a Global Partnership for Africa's development and inclusion in the world. In Mbeki's words, "this poses a challenge and an *opportunity* to all countries of the world. The *continued marginalisation of Africa from the globalisation process*, and the *social exclusion* of the vast majority of our people constitute a serious *threat* to global social stability… Implementation of our programme will not only be a major step forward in developing effective global governance but also make a profound contribution to the future welfare of the entire globe."

By ways of problematising Mbeki's discourse, we would like to make four preliminary remarks:

1. In the very first instance Africa could be seen as a continent in dire need, and it looks towards "developed" countries for assistance. Mbeki's discourse is primarily phrased in terms of the **economic**. But he resorts to a very astute rhetoric wherein he simultaneously refrains from presenting Africa as an indigent continent while evoking developed countries' (as former colonisers) culpability for Africa's predicament. For example, he admits that African countries ("for a range of complex reasons") have *weak states*, but was quick to add that the focus of the programme is not increased aid, but increased *investments* in viable infrastructure. The fact remains however that post-colonial Africa is now a "post-independent" continent.

2. This is closely related to our second remark, namely that great emphasis is put on **globalisation**. Africa wants to be inscribed in the global capitalistic economy as equal partners, i.e. without sacrificing their independence and (one could add) without falling prey to yet another form of colonisation by the West. But does not capitalism, by its very nature, function by melting everything that is solid into thin air, by alienating every identity and every independence? Does Africa's thirst for inclusion in the global market not undermine its intended renaissance?

3. This brings us to our third remark: Mbeki makes no explicit reference to an **African cultural identity** as such. What is at stake is a revival or a rebirth of Africa, but it is significant and not merely coincidental, (as he explicitly points out in his opening remarks) that his briefing on the implementation of MAP is presented at the World Economic Forum meeting. A wide variety of issues are

dealt with: socio-economic progress; the development of an industrial strategy, of infrastructure and of a financing mechanism; investment in the information and communication technology, etc., but nowhere does he mention anything concerning the re-establishment of an authentic African identity. It was back in 1996 when Mbeki made his famous "I am an African" speech to the South African parliament which set the basis of a new social movement to promote pride in being African and to catapult the continent's economic development. This suggests that the issue of an African identity is part and parcel of the renaissance dream, but when presented to an international audience (as opposed to his "home crowd") deliberately omitted. Might this be the indication of an underlying trauma? A trauma concerning the colonial violation of the African identity, not made manifest for fear of making vulnerable that which have only very recently been regained. In this light the so-called "African Renaissance" now appears to be less of a renewal than mere scar tissue precariously covering its desecration by an European rationality that had to unmake it to re-make and to eventually discard it.

4. And to the "developed" countries' response, in the final instance: now that Africa is attempting a phoenix-like ecstasis out of its colonial ashes, isn't Europe once again pushed into the role of a *deus ex 'machina* [5] to offer an alternative to the remnants of an European modernity with which Africa is saddled. An European modernity from which it cannot rid itself without being left with nothing. But can Europe, on the one hand, offer a non-reductive alternative without falling into precisely the position that was to be problematized (colonialism); and on the other hand, can it remain silent *and* remain ethical at the same time?

1.2 The philosophical context of the ethical dilemma

The question at hand is by no means being asked for the first time. A pattern has emerged in the French philosophy of the generation running roughly from the mid to late sixties up to the present. It is the generation associated with the terms "post-structuralism" and postmodernism" and the names Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigary, Julia Kristeva, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-François Lyotard, amongst others, come to mind. The pattern concerns difference and its valorisation. The Same and the Other and their interaction or relation towards each other can be conceptualised in

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[5] Something or somebody that, at a decisive moment, appears as from nowhere with the solution.

different ways. Broadly speaking the Same could be defined as that which is known, familiar or ordered, and the Other as that mysterious unexplained "something" that lies outside and defines the limits of the known, that which is exterior and foreign. The relationship between the Same and the Other is an important one because, as Althusser points out, identity or consciousness, whether it is individual or social, cannot accede to the Real through its own internal development but only "by the radical discovery of what is *other than itself*."[6] However, this conception relates to our ethical dilemma only indirectly, and might, in the first instance, be misleading. More relevant is the most common "postmodernist" criticism levelled against the egocentric (Eurocentric) assimilation of the Other (Africa) by the Self (Europe), which, according to Levinas, has characterised the Western metaphysical tradition, a legacy passed onto us from Plato to Hegel. According to Levinas' reading of the history of Western thought, the Other has generally been regarded as something provisionally separate from the Same (or the Self), but ultimately reconcilable with it. Otherness, or alterity, appears as a temporary interruption to be eliminated as it is incorporated into or reduced to sameness.[7] Derrida reiterates the same idea in "Violence and metaphysics", in which he scrutinises Levinas' critique of totalizing thought: Western thought is characterised by its neutralising effect on the Other, by the fact that it nullifies the Other by converting or transforming it into the Same. It is responsible for a conversion or reformation – a proselytisation of the Other, to the Same/Self. Derrida adds that the prevailing rationality has the same effect as oppression.[8]

Postmodern thought can thus, rather brutally, be characterised as that thought which refuses to turn the Other into the Same. Postmodern thought also recognises, however, that the Other can never speak for itself *as* the Other. Simon During[9] defines post-colonialism as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts or images. Accordingly, post-colonialism might derive hope and legitimation from postmodern thought's refusal to turn the Other into the Same. On the other hand, postmodernity's concomitant refusal to

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[6] Althusser 1965: 144, in O'Farrell, C. (1989). Foucault, *Historian or philosopher?* London: The Macmillan Press LTD, p. 31.
[7] Davis, C. (1996). *Levinas. An introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 3.
[8] Derrida, J. (1976). "Violence and metaphysics: An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas", Alan Bass, trans., in Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.
[9] See "Postmodernism or post-colonialism today" in Milner, A., Thomson, P., & Worth, C. (Eds.)(1990*). Postmodern conditions*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, Ltd., p. 114.

acknowledge the plausibility of a return to "uncontaminated" origins or identities unequivocally undermines the possibility of post-colonial identity. But let us look more closely at the (historical) context of the ethical dilemma at play here.

1.3 The Historical Context of the Ethical Dilemma

Similar to Western thought's reductive relationship towards alterity, the relationship between Europe and Africa has more often than not been an asymmetric one of Europeanization.[10] Europe has directed its violating gaze to Africa – panoptic and asymmetric: "to see without being seen"[11]. In this Europe was not driven by curiosity for the other to transgress its borders time and again – it just wanted more of the same, it wanted to meet itself *in* the other. Which is why Africa has actually remained absent. Europe's goal was never accommodation, but assimilation: it forced African reality into the straitjacket of existing opinions and instead of objectively recording reality, they sought to obtain representations which answered already existing European stereotypes and needs. This European image of Africa is simultaneously a representation and a misrepresentation: we saw what we wanted to see, what we were able to see.

The violence inherent to colonisation is unmistakable, transparent even. African states were imprisoned as almost so many European colonies, and the prison is the only place where power is manifested in its naked state, in its most excessive form, and where it is justified as moral force.[12] The ethical status of colonisation as a form of imprisonment is of course, today, seen retrospectively, contentious and highly questionable. Present day Europeanization, however, is still practised under the guise of moral rehabilitation. After all, Africa is *dysfunctional;* it is in dire straits and turning its needy gaze towards their former

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[10] Joachim Ritter describes Europeanization as "the process in which non-European peoples detach themselves from their deep-rooted forms of life, take on the European forms of social production, education and state institutions, and *spontaneously and actively makes all this their own."* In "Europäisierung als europäisches Problem", in Ritter, J. (1969). *Metaphysik und Politik. Studien zu Aristoteles und Hegel*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 324, in Visker, R. (1999*).* "Uneuropean desires. Toward a provincialism without romanticism", in *Truth and singularity. Phaenomenologica,* **155**: 147.

[11] The Panopticon is an architectural apparatus first introduced by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the 18th century and later thoroughly analysed by Michel Foucault in his work on power, *Discipline and power*. Foucault discusses the Panopticon as a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it. Accordingly it assures the automatic functioning of power: surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action. See Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and power,* Allen Sheridan, trans., London: Penguin Books, pp. 195-228.

[12] "Intellectual and power: A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gillez Deleuze", in Bouchard, D.F. (Ed.) (1977). *Michel Foucault. Language, Counter-memory, practice. Selected*

saviour-enslaver, Europe. Wars are raging, governmental structures are crumbling, economies are failing and people are starving. Africa's quandary is that it has fallen pray to the sad paradigm of the terror brought on by thinking in terms of binary oppositions such as that between savagery and culture. According to this point of view, the loss of culture bears with it the inevitable onslaught of savage anarchy.

But the post-colonial African predicament is somewhat more complex. Having lost its "innocence", after being violated by European colonisers, Africa's original "wildness" has been tamed and drained – it can no longer sustain Africa. Not that we hereby suggest some sort of noble (mythical) point of pre-European origin to which it can no longer return. There might not have been any pure Hobbesian state of nature before Europe sunk its claws into Africa, but it did function in some way or another – independently, and more importantly, independent of Europe's value judgements: it didn't *have* to do well according to Europe's standards.

So now it lives amidst the large-scale fragmentation of previously held systems of orientation or frames of meaning-giving reference. It is left with mere fragments, the debris of an Afro-European tradition – unwilling to subject itself to its ever-receding claims to authority, and uncertain as to what awaits it in its rejection thereof. "Original" African culture has been contaminated - dispirited and enfeebled. Europe has extracted itself from its African colonies. As violator, it has disengaged itself only to paradoxically re-engage in African affairs as "saviour", as bearer of the dubious torch of enlightening reason. The same torch that lit the original flame of a modernity which we now seek an alternative for, an alternative which would, per definition, be yet another European alternative, yet another form of Europeanization. It might also be added that post-colonial Africa is left with an *economic* predicament and by turning towards "developed" countries, as Mbeki proposes, it actively participates in its own re-enslavement or violation. Later we shall return to the economic aspect.

The question, which presents itself, is whether or not Europe has anything to offer Africa apart from a violation of its alterity. And if Europe is capable of being other than violating; if it can conjure up a voice that speaks not as a representative consciousness articulating the stifled truth of the collectivity from on high, what possible form can this other discourse take? What, after all, is Europe's stake in its involvement in Africa? Why bother to speak at all? Is it to

Essays and interviews, Bouchard, D.F. & Simon, S., trans. Ithaca, New York: Cornell

purge itself from its own inherited collective debt, that it voices an enlightened protest against colonisation, domination, racism, discrimination, etc. (which seems inevitably to result in a kind of reprise of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" – in an auto-colonisation)? Or is it in an effort to civilise that wild element in our western culture that it offers its generous contributions towards taming Africa? On the other hand, can it remain silent in the face of the other? Can it evade the appeal of the Other which (as Levinas has shown) is an *ethical* obligation?

1.4 Going Beyond the *Violence-Silence* Dilemma: A Possible Third Position

Accordingly there seems to be three possible responses, two of which turn out to be, upon closer investigation, mere academic options, rather than desirable alternatives. In the face of its ethical obligation towards Africa, Europe cannot possibly resort to yet another form of violation nor can it turn a blind eye. What course of action is left? What possible third position can Europe take towards Africa? The deconstructivist would see an ideal opportunity in our seemingly insurmountable dilemma – he would recommend us to place the terms in which the dilemma is posed under suspicion: does this binary opposition between self and other reflect our problematic accurately? It would lead us to explore a possible alienation of both the identity of the self and the alterity or the other. At the end, the self and the other might no longer fit the rigid oppositional structure of a binary logic. This course of action might not serve to dissolve our dilemma, but we harbour no such pretensions. Rather we shall attempt a tentative transgressive act: a working on the limits of modern thought. "For modern thought," as Foucault writes, "no morality is possible….Thought […] is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it becomes ….a perilous act."[13] Does this imply that an alternative African modernity ought to be phrased in terms other than that of modern thought, and is this at all possible? Whether or not this approach opens the way towards an ethical response which does not "break", "dissociate", or "enslave" as soon as it is articulated, remains to be seen.

Towards a critical assessment of another response we shall turn to an urbanistic discourse on post-colonial Africa. But why do we turn to urbanism to deconstruct the terms of an 'ethical' dilemma? One of the advantages urban theory offers is its somewhat hybrid character between practice and theory: it takes material constructs, actual movements of people and goods, the (trans)formations of territory and space, etc. as its object of study and orders them by using theoretical

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University Press, p. 210.

paradigms. Another point is that the scope of the study we shall use also includes socio-political aspects, demographics as well as global, cultural, and economical phenomena. It is not limited to urbanism in the strict sense of the word. But how do urbanists write on Africa? Rather positively, as we shall see.

We are resisting the notion that Lagos represents an African city en route to becoming modern. Or, in a more politically correct idiom, that it is becoming modern in a valid, "African" way. Rather, we think it possible to argue that Lagos represents a developed, extreme, paradigmatic case-study of a city at the forefront of globalising modernity.[14]

2. An Urbanistic Discourse on Postcolonial Africa: *The Harvard Design School Project on the City* (HPC) of Lagos

A study on the Nigerian city of Lagos performed by "The Harvard Design School Project" (HPC) provides us with the source material for our reading of an urbanistic genre in postcolonial Africa. It has recently appeared in the collaborative volume entitled *Mutations* which incorporates a wide variety of studies, analyses and texts on the theme of urban-architectural mutations as it is found evolving around the globe. These essentially urbanistic studies and texts serve as a platform upon which a wide variety of elements are brought into play.

In looking at the African city of Lagos, HPC certainly does not attempt to return to some mythical starting-point of noble pre-European origin. Its critique of developed countries and economies (by ways of Lagos) does not procceed from a primitive, unvarnished perspective, or from the romanticised (Western) vision of a naively-native Africa. It is not pre-colonial Africa that is offered as critical yardstick against which Western capitalistic organisations are measured. For Lagos criticises the first world on its own level, i.e. of economic (urban) functionality and efficiency, and offers alternative capitalistic, institutional and urban scenario's and strategies. In what follows, we shall investigate this more closely.

2.1. The Micro-economics of Lagos: Dysfunctionality Generating Greater Efficiency.

According to HPC, the fundamental conundrum of Lagos can be contributed to its *continued, productive, even exuberant existence* in spite of the near-complete absence of those infrastructures, systems, organisations, and amenities that define

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[13] Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*, trans. unknown, London: Routledge, p. 328.
[14] Koolhaas, R. et.al. (2001). *Mutations. The Havard Desigh School Project*, p. 653.

the word "city" in terms of Western planning methodology. In short, and in whichever way, it is a city that "works". Its shortcomings have generated ingenious, critical alternative systems, which demand a redefinition of certain canonical concepts in the fields of urban planning and related social sciences. The operation of Lagos megalopolis, according to HPC, illustrates the large-scale efficacy of systems and agents considered marginal, liminal, informal, or illegal according to traditional understandings of the city.

As an example HPC refers to the "traffic jam" or "bottleneck" which in Lagos has become an opportunity for entrepreneurial activity: The incomplete road or constricted intersection has become less of a dysfunctional condition than a place of thriving economies. "Jam-space", the totally negotiable, usually illegal and hugely productive space of the traffic jam, is no longer something to fix, solve, or even rationalise. As roads jam, their traffic spills into surrounding areas, expanding motorable terrain by default. The detour redirects the infrastructure's patrons to under-served commercial districts. Jams and detours thus allow more of the city to be accessed more of the time. In short, Lagos has discovered a way of taking advantage of the traffic jam.

Another telling example is Oshodi, Lagos' most vibrant marketplace. It has transformed existing sites of the city's transport infrastructure – an incomplete on-ramp and an almost defunct railway (the last remaining but dying colonial institution). At the juncture where Oshodi is situatued one finds construction mechanisms failing to connect closing segments, a cloverleaf intersection with only two-and-a-half leaves. The dysfunctional off-ramps, otherwise impediments to circulation, have been recuperated as an enormously functional intersection: this non-place of congestion has been turned into destination. Oshodi's "incomplete" layout in many ways increases the number of things that it can do. Taking advantage of the interplay of different traffic patterns many services and amenities have colonised the off-ramps and roundabouts. Furthermore, Oshodi sustains itself in a state of flux – it continually remakes and replenishes itself through the accumulated exchanges of naira (Nigerian currency) and goods and by the movements of its individual mobile traders. In short, Oshodi succeeded in transforming a defunct remnant of Colonial rule into a focal point of economical activity; it is literally "marketing" an unfinished cloverleaf.

2.2. Lagos's Micro-economics at the Forefront of Globalizing Modernity

HPC focuses on the seemingly dysfunctional elements, the extreme cases as they are found in the urbanscape of Lagos. Upon closer investigation such extremity

is shown to be a very rational response (or correction) to keep a dysfunctional scenario from collapsing. HPC however, is not just interested in showing how Lagos cleverly utilises the structural "left-overs" of its colonial past. HPC also shows how, in the here and now, Lagos act out alternative modernities, in a more affirmative way. HPC even goes so far as to call Lagos "at the forefront of globalising modernity".[15] Therein HPC is actually turning the traditional tables: no longer should Africa look toward developed countries for guidance and aid, but developed countries should look toward Africa to learn from its ingenious mutations born of its shortcomings. Lagos' mutations are here presented as foreshadowing the next stage in the development of capitalism.

Approximately half of the study is devoted to a case-study to illustrate the latter. This is done by ways of an analysis of an electronics market in Lagos.[16] This market is presented as a paradigmatic case-study of the most recent, advanced structures, methods and strategies in global market capitalism. HPC is literally hereby saying "that Lagos [Africa] is not catching up with us [Europe]", but that "we may be catching up with Lagos"[17]. Even though and inspite of the fact that Lagos does not conform to Western standards or methodologies, it functions more efficiently than they do. So not only does HPC urge us to go beyond "first world" standards, but they also argue that Lagos effectively questions the actuality and effectivity of these standards. Once we succeed in ridding ourselves of our own (logocentric) standards, Lagos succeeds in uncovering the loopholes and dysfunctionality of these standards and effectively offers an alternative to them. But how does HPC give these bold assertions substance and credibility? How does HPC conceive of a third world city as a highly advanced node in the network of globalising modernity? Let us look more closely at their study of Alaba.

As mentioned above, Alaba is an electronics market in Lagos, also known as "little Japan" since it accounts for 75% of the electronics trade in West Africa. HPC also refers to it as "the largest electrionics market on the continent"[18]. HPC shows how it is connected with other electronics markets all around the globe: Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Italy, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. The "Alabans" import their materials and products from these markets: mostly used goods, or off-sales, parts as well as end-products. Once in Alaba, they're either immediately sold, distributed or re/assembled. According to HPC, Alaba's operating

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[15] *Ibid*.
[16] Cf. *Ibid*, pp. 702-716.
[17] *Ibid*, p. 653.
[18] *Ibid*, p. 703.

formula is based on "circumvention of traditional supply chains."[19] HPC also uses terms such as "sector-straddling", and "fusion"[20] refering to Alaba's being between sectors, between the official and the unofficial, the formal and the informal (or illegal). According to them, the temporary fusion between informal processes and "mature" institutions might even be read as a blueprint for progressive urban strategies[21]. The equidistance of Alaba Market from the (official) Apapa Port and the (unofficial) Benin border town of Seme, for instance, enabled Alaba to straddle the two sectors which in turn "maximized the market's responsiveness to supply-side opportunities."[22] But Alaba also parasitises upon other sector-straddling markets in Southeast Asia, Russia, and, most recently, the Middle East. Mimesis or imitative technology is part of the Alaba formula: Merchantile prospectors (or "boy scouts") are sent to the various "free market walhalla's" – to Taipei, Moscow, Singapore, Mexico City, Sao Paolo and Dubai ("the Klondike of free market success") – to "take notes".[23]

At his point it might appear as if Alaba Market, by "making do" with the "secondary and tertiary material cycles" of the modern world is merely a free-loader riding on the back of the first world global economy, albeit a clever one. This, however, would be to miss HPC's point. For HPC, it is precisely this ability to be "the intelligent parasite" that has become the very paradigm of "post/late capitalism" and which puts Alaba at the forefront of global capitalism. HPC alludes to "the Japanese experience in imitative technology"[24], and indeed, it is precisely industrial espionage that has enabled the Japanese to make the same (high-tech, high-quality) goods as their American and European counterparts, more cost-effectively. By just copying their know-how, the Japanese avoid the high costs associated with primary market and related research. And this is an injunction right from the top – HPC quotes former Nigerian secretary of Finance, Allison Ayida: *"Our laws on patents and copyrights are premature. We should, with a sense of urgency, encourage and condone industrial espionage and piracy."*[25] Again we should not interpret this indelicate statement merely negatively. For HPC, informal markets, such as Alaba, is not doomed to archaic inefficiencies (as Clifford Geertz suggests), but is at the forefront of the "globalization regime" – a regime characterised by speed, incessant signification,

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[19] *Ibid*, p. 702.
[20] Cf. pp. 702, 708.
[21] *Ibid*, p. 708.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 703.
[23] *Ibid*, p. 709.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*.

unimpeded capital flows, the hyper-reality of credit and fiscality, and the amplification of micro-dynamics as keys to profit.[26]

2.3. Connecting Globalising Modernity and the African "Urban" Condition.

Up until this point we've mainly talked economics. Since we are essentially dealing with an urbanistic study it is crucial to see how HPC links these global capitalistic phenomena with the urban. We could summarize HPC's project as exploring urban forms and phenomena generated by global, capitalistic processes. According to them the greatest potentials for new urbanisms can be found in the Lagosian winning combination of post/late capitalism and informal, marginal and even illegal elements. At this point it is important to stress that HPC understands "urban" in the broadest sense of the word – it also includes social, political and cultural aspects. You could say that they conceive of the urban in terms of the Greek *polis*, which referred to a political, judicial, economic, as well as an urban, territorial entitiy. HPC shows how an essentially economic entity, Alaba market, generates mutations on all levels including the urban, social, judicial and political level. Alaba market actually "built a town around itself"[27] It has organised its own civic councils, banks, security organisations, telecom-network, its own provision of churches, its own brand of democracy and even its own form of justice.[28] Of course, it has also organised its own spatial logic and features: landscape rather than city without well-defined streets; organised underdetermined stretches in which materials, goods and peoples circulate and communicate in indeterminable fashion.

But not only do the post/late capitalistic processes, based on the intelligent straddling and fusing of the formal and informal, produce radical urbanities (in the broadest sense of the word). The inverse is also true: African cities form the ideal terrain for these global mechanisms: "Globalization has provided a vast new range of opportunities for economic and political actors to operate outside increasingly outmoded laws and regulatory systems, as well as to spawn new relationships among them. African cities exude an availability to these opportunities precisely because they appear outside of effective control, and thus anything could happen."[29] The question off course is what exactly makes African cities such an ideal host for these post/late capitalistic logics? Could it be located in their flexibility to change regardless of fixed, preconceived urban models that determine what a city ought to be, and how it should work, rather than - in the case of Alaba – in how it works in

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[26] *Ibid*, p. 715.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 703.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] See Abdou Maliq Simone, *Urban processes and change in Africa,* p. 105, in Ibid, p. 715.

reality? From HPC's repeated testimony that "Lagos works"[30] we might deduce that its essence lies in its functioning, in the fact that it works. Lagos harbours no theoretical ideals or utopian conceptualisations such as could be said of the modern city – it just works, it is a practice or even more: "a form of collective research, conducted by a team of eight-to-twenty-five million."[31] This working and functioning independently of ideological constructs, identified by HPC, would then make it an ideal terrain for hosting the free-flows of global capital. At the end of the analyses globalizing modernity seems to fuse into the "African condition". If Alaba market is a paradigmatic example of late/post capitalistic logic, its urban scape and processes could be said to be *post-urban*.

2.4. Uncovering HPC's Presupposition

Crucial to our argument is the fact that HPC considers Lagos to be at the forefront of *globalizing modernity*. More specifically this could be understood to mean the *overcoming* of isolated existing mechanisms and structures and the *progress* towards a global network by means of connective capitalistic processes. This idea is primarily Western in origin, but is rapidly enveloping the entire globe. Taking globalizing modernity as their point of departure, HPC aims is to lay bare those mutative effects caused by global capital and culture around the globe, including those found in so-called third world countries, and to connect them with the mutations found in so-called first world countries. In their own words: *"The fact that many of the trends of modern, Western cities can be seen in hyperbolic guise in Lagos suggests that to write about the African city is to write about the terminal condition of Chicago, London, or Los Angeles. It is to examine the city elsewhere, in the developing world. It is to reconsider the modern city and to suggest a paradigm for its future."*[32] (This is illustrated, for example, by a case-study investigating the desertion of the CBD of Chicago. It has become almost completely abandonned due to a complex series of factors: the flexibility of suburbia for investors; suburban "mall" culture; the exodus of the wealthier inhabitants to gated communities tranforming the centre into a zone of social implosion and high-crime. This phenomenon can be connected to the globalisation of capital, to the way in which territories have become disconnected from their historical functions and programmes, indeed, with the most radical urban mutations: the CBD as local consolidation of business has fallen prey to the dislocating forces of global money-streams.)

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[30] *Ibid*, p. 652.
[31] *Ibid*, p. 719.
[32] *Ibid*, p. 653.

But if we have stressed that HPC should be defined as globally oriented urbanists which makes them perhaps also *neo-modernists*, how do we make sense of their subversive "post-modern" sensibility for the mutations (or transgressions) of modern (Western) urban theories and concepts; and how, might we ask, do they position themselves toward the alienating side of global capital? In the case of Lagos, they're never evaluate these alienations negatively since they see in them "progressive urban strategies", and they still consider these mutations as part of globalizing modernity itself, and even more: "at the forefront", and speak of "catching up" and "more advanced". Still it is not unimportant to stress that this position (taking globalizing modernity as their point of departure) also creates a gap, which in a way is put outside the question or 'questioning'. HPC still seems to focus on the difference *within* the global, which excludes a problematization of the difference *without* or *extrinsic to* globalizing modernity.

3. A "Comparative Methodology": HPC versus Mbeki

One thing that the HPC study does do, is to perform a discourse on Lagos and by extention, on the African condition. As "Europeans" (or globalists rather, since themselves already critical of modern European urban phenomena) confronted by Africa, they do not remain silent but attempt, at least tentatively, to speak without reducing Africa to "European" standards. (We refer to "European", but in the preceding part we have already shown how HPC, in their criticism of the West, have melted the former oppositions between Europe and Africa into a global modernity, into an economical, social, cultural and urban complex whose identity lies in its constant mutation and redefiniton.) How does this discourse, as writing on the Other, compare to Mbeki's writing on the Self? Does either one succeed in offering us an alternative African modernity, an ethical alternative that leaves the alterity of the Other intact? Is that at all possible or merely another "modern" utopian ideal? What do we hope to gain by precariously comparing discourses and entities?

In this essay we have attempted to follow a "comparative methodology" similar to that used by Rudi Visker (1999) in *Truth and singularity.* According to him comparative studies only become interesting when we uncover a certain "unthought" which, in attaching itself to a thought, has rendered it to a certain extent *inaccessible* and *unrepeatable* for those who come "after" it. The respective authors (being compared) thus find themselves being dispossessed by that which, in withdrawing, allows them to think. In our attempt to understand what is being said or sketched we have to take into account what the author had to leave out of the picture in order to draw it at all. In other words, in our address directed towards the other, our

communication (and violation) unfolds on two levels: apart from the content ("thought"), we also unknowingly, but inevitably impart an implicit "unthought" at the level of form. Accordingly, a confrontation between two authors only becomes interesting at that extreme point where the insurmountable gap in their respective discourses is brought to communicate. The real encounter would then amount to a confrontation with that "formal unthought" in the other's discourse, both unknowable to him and irreducible to the unthought implicit to our own discourse.

Our essay attempts the same comparative logic. We commenced with a rather crude comparison between Africa (Other) and Europe (Self); in the second part we redefinied and refined the terms of the comparison by broadening our rather outdated conception of an European rationality to include "globalizing modernity". In the third part, Lagos, as third world city is compared to Western first world cities (in HPC's study), and finally, HPC's discourse, as "Europeans" writing on Africa is compared to Mbeki's discourse which, in turn, represents an African writing on Africa for a first world audience. At first sight, it might appear as if HPC follows a method analogue to Visker's: HPC explicitly states how precisely in the extremity of Lagos' conditions – as an urban constellation which is constantly at its limit and reformulating that limit, and therefore in its extreme point of self-alienation – it communicates with the West. HPC does not write about the (pure) identity of the other as such, it analyses the mutations in the other. And if we interpret mutation as a form of alienation (the mutated as an alienation of an original condition) we can say that it analyses the alienated other, the other inasfar as he is essentially alienated from his identity. HPC's study uncovers the various ways in which global capital has mutated Lagos' urban, political and social identity. Finally it is this mutated (self-alienated) Lagos that is put in communication with Europe, not Lagos as an urban phenomenon fully coinciding with itself, i.e. not Lagos as a pure alterity. This is what is meant when they write that they resist the notion that Lagos represents an African city en route to becoming modern "in a valid, 'African' way".

By proceeding in such a way, HPC *seems to* reach beyond the "pure" identity, towards that region of inherent lack or alienation which forms the condition for the possibility of authentic, non-reductive and mutually respectful communication. This is what Mbeki's discourse on the African renaissance seems to lack. Although he never explicitly touches upon the question of an authentic African socio-cultural identity, his temperance in this regard implicitly communicates a nostalgia for that lost origin or identity. And so he fails to reach beyond the region of "pure" identity and so too fails to address Europe without falling into precisely the position that was to be problematised – without commiting an act of inverse violation by confronting the other

with an unwavering identity that cannot but reduce his/her alterity to the terms of the self.

So superficially we find the same thematics, present in Mbeki's briefing, in HPC's study – both focus on the ecomomic and on globalisation. Upon closer investigation, however, the differences become apparent: HPC proceeds by highlighting the economic mutations in Lagos, and contributes Lagos' progressiveness with regards to globalisation to these very structural deviations. Mbeki, on the other hand, maintains that Africa has continuously been marginalised from the globalisation process and contributes Africa's economic backlog to this exclusion. Mbeki laments the fact that Africa has weak states, whereas HPC sees Africa as the ideal host for globalistic processes precisely because of the greater institutional freedom still to be found there. In an article which appeared in *the Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 15 February 1999 Anton Christen comments on Mbeki's dream of an African Renaissance: "Behind that phrase is the effort to generate a positive African self-image as a prerequisite to mastering the continent's economic and political crises."[33] Mbeki's European audience seems to deduce that he wants to found an African Renaissance upon the preservation of an African identity. So Mbeki approaches his Western audience with a proposition, a request even – unthreateningly he approaches as a wolf in sheep's clothing, since he brings with him an identity equally capable of violation.

HPC, on the other hand, goes so far as to put the identity of the Self at stake by a confrontation with the Other. According to them, the African city forces the reconceptualisation of the traditional Western city itself. The mutations identified in Lagos are compared with the mutations found in the greater Western urban landscape. HPC understands that non-reductive communication between first and third world cities is only possible when extreme regions of alienation are compared. The confrontation with the alterity of the Other forces the Self to work on its limits and eventually to trangress them. In this way, HPC's analysis of the hyperbolic conditions of Lagos leads to a transgression of the traditional urban identity. HPC clearly considers the contemporary West African condition sufficiently other "to warrant a new round of postcolonial 'exploration', with different intentions and a more intensive methodology than the 19th century campaign prosecuted on the same turf."[34] HPC stresses that the African city has the ability to mutate more uninhibitly or

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[33] See Internet:
http://www.nzz.ch/english/background/background1999/background9902/bg990215south_afri ca.htmlhttp://www.nzz.ch/english/background/background1999/background9902/bg990215so uth_africa.html
[34] *Ibid*, p. 718.

authentically. Whereas Europe, despite of and apart from mutable economic undercurrents (global capitalistic processes), still seems to hold fast to the bygone traditional urban concept of the city. The traditional city stands, as it were, steadfast and immutable (or almost) amidst the economic flux which manages to erode every other bastion of tradition. Lagos' urban, architectural, social, judical and political structures, on the other hand, seem to mutate coextensively with global economic processes.

HPC is thus very well aware (and mostly interested in) the fact that global capitalism effects mutations and visible changes in other domains whereas Mbeki seems to think that Africa can celebrate its renaissance, if and only if, it can remain "uncontaminated", with the African identity intact.

4. Conclusion

We have come a long way towards an ethical *problematisation* of the search for an alternative African modernity for European modernity and postmodernity. Have we, in the preceding part, actually succeeded in thinking differently? Foucault has taught us that the question of knowing if you can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and thinking at all.[35] We certainly have not found solutions, but we have gained new perspective by rereading various discourses and the practices upon which they are founded. Our study has amounted to successive fragments, analyses of the "problematisations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematisations are formed".[36] But let us retrace our steps and try and reconstruct the problematisation.

We proceeded by ways of the critical analysis of two specific discourses, respectively that of Thabo Mbeki on the socalled African Renaissance, and HPC's urbanistic analysis of the Nigerian city, Lagos. Both illustrate how easily modern thought can become a perilous act.[37] Each discourse outlines a certain interaction or proposed interaction between Africa and the Western world by ways of global capitalism. What we are interested in, philosophically speaking, is how this translates into different interactions between the Self and the Other, and with that we inevitably

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[35] Foucault, M. (1992). *The History of Sexuality. Volume II: The use of pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin Books: p. 8.
[36] For this we are obviously indebted to Foucault. Cf. *Ibid*, p. 11.
[37] Although Mbeki comes across as being more post-colonial and HPC more post-modernist in their respective discourses, neither succeed in talking about the modern phenomenon of global capitalism in something other than a modern discourse; and modern thought proceeds by ways of a violent logocentric rationality swallowing all difference in its path.

arrive at our ethical question: How does non-reductive communication between the Self and the Other become possible? In following Levinas we have started with the premise that when confronted by the Other we are *ethically obligated* to respond, but a response invariably amounts to a violation of his/her alterity. We found ourselves facing an insurmountable dilemma: both silence and response amount to violence. At this critical juncture we – gropingly, and tentatively attempted to deconstruct the two poles of our binary opposition, with the hope of going, with Nietzsche, beyond the proverbial "good and evil" duality. This deconstruction was done with the aid of an urbanistic study – a practice which takes the alienation of both self and other as their point of departure.

Following this course has brought us to the actual *problematision* of the identity of the Self and the alterity of the Other in the third part of our paper. In this we have hoped to localise those remote regions of alienation at the heart of both which would finally be able to communicate in a non-reductive and mutually respectful way. But what have we been able to deduce from the two discourses:

Mbeki wants to found an African Renaissance upon the preservation of the African identity, whereas HPC embraces the mutative effects of global capitalism and therein localises its strength. Mbeki does not seem to have come to terms with the inevitable alienation caused by Africa's colonial past and fortified by its global capitalistic future.

HPC, on the other hand, selectively focuses on the "positive" mutations. Its research is based on non-representative samples which cannot be said to represent the general population or the entire continent. (The many wars raging chronicly in Africa immediately come to mind, mostly driven by ethnic, religious, cultural fervours that are more difficult to explain solely in terms of mutations induced by something like a globalising modernity.) But then again, their aim is not the accurate representation or reflection of a reality that can only amount to the joining of the general chorus of lament over Africa's seemingly endless wars and crises. That they leave to CNN. Instead their aim is to offer innovative alternatives or "new scenario's" for a new-fashioned urbanism, by exploring the intensities and mutations produced by a global capitalistic culture. HPC stressed the "positive" phenomena in Africa because they, and only they, can indicate the way towards change.

However, HPC takes Lagos as being at the forefront of "globalising modernity". And this is a very problematic assumption in the light of the fact that, as Foucault reminds us, for modern thought no morality is possible – it proceeds by ways of a violent logocentric rationality swallowing all difference in its path. Instead of

offering an alternative modernity for Africa, they are in fact only preaching the extention or globalisation of European modernity with its two corollary notions of progress and overcoming.

In the light of this last remark, we might ask ourselves of course, how it is possible to critically overcome European thought and the culture of modernity? Nietzsche and Heidegger have long since shown us that the concept of "overcoming" belongs to that same system, and must therefore also be rejected. It is impossible, they suggest, for us to think our way out of modernity with the philosophical system of thought and the language supplied by modernity; yet no system that has "overcome" the errors of modernity and "progressed" beyond them is currently available to us, and there is no choice but to continue to use the existing system. This leaves us, along with Nietzsche and Heidegger with a quandary – but it is a quandary that for Gianni Vattimo defines post-modernity itself as a "peculiar 'critical' relationship with Western modern thought'[38] that works to dissolve the culture of modernity, while prolonging it by continuing to depend upon its philosophical system. Even though HPC emphasises the mutations of modern constructs and thereby are postmodernist in their analyses, this interest does not serve to dissolve the culture of modernity, but is founded upon the modernist belief in progress and overcoming.

If we wish to take seriously the Heideggerian notion of the "unthought" we have to stop congratulating ourselves for having made these two discourses accessible. They are in fact still not accessible to the audience at which they are directed. On the surface it might seem that we no longer have the feeling that we fail to understand what the Other says or fail to see what he is trying to show us. However the distance between him (Other) and us (Self) is greater than it was before, simply because in trying to understand him we also had to take into account what he had to leave out of the picture to be able to depict it at all. To be sure, we can share everything with an author (be it Mbeki or HPC) – except his way of being dispossessed by that which, in withdrawing, allows him to think. For Mbeki this is the question of an African identity and for HPC it is the fundamental assumption of a "globalising modernity". These issues at the heart of their respective discourse both form the condition for their possibility of communicating or believing in anything at all, *and* the condition for the impossibility of their non-violent communication.

The possibility of authentic, non-reductive and mutually respectful communication now seems to be less of a possibility than an impossibility. This notion of "non-reductive communication" should not be mistaken for an utopian

dialogue without violence – for that is impossible. Rather it should be understood in terms of the Greek *agon* – as an agonistic combat or interplay of corporeal forces where the opponents are continuously being transformed by each other, where the struggle never solidifies into domination. But despite this qualification, the transcendental condition for the impossibility of non-reductive communication still holds. There is always a primary violence inherent to communicating with the other – a primary violence of which we too are not exempt. Mere communication amounts to violence therein that it is accompanied with an "unavoidable duality…both exterior to him and indispensible to him" "…an inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth."[39] We cannot speak without our violating "unthought", but we cannot remain silent either. Silence does not even allow the ethical relation to come into play, since it tries to eliminate the unthought, as the pre-condition for the possibility of ethics, from occuring at all. Paradoxically, it does so in an attempt to be ethical by avoiding the pre-ethical violence of the unthought. So we must speak with a certain degree of obstinacy and a certain degree of awareness of the unthought by continuously transgressing the boundaries of the self towards that region of alterity within. So eventhough non-violent communication is impossible, there are degrees of violation and some discourses, such as that of HPC, could be said to be less violating; whereas other discourses, such as ours, could be said to be more violating… Because even as we write now the unthought has spoken along, saying more than articulated, violating even, or precisely, *in* rationalising. We cannot rely upon a postmodern ethics to saveguard ourselves or the other from being violated, still how else could we have spoken at all?

[38] Vattimo, G. (1988). *The end of modernity. Nihilism and hermeneutics in post-modern culture*, trans. J. R. Snyder. Oxford: Polity Press, p. 3.
[39] Foucault, M. (1994). *The order of things*, trans. unknown. London: Routledge, p. 326.