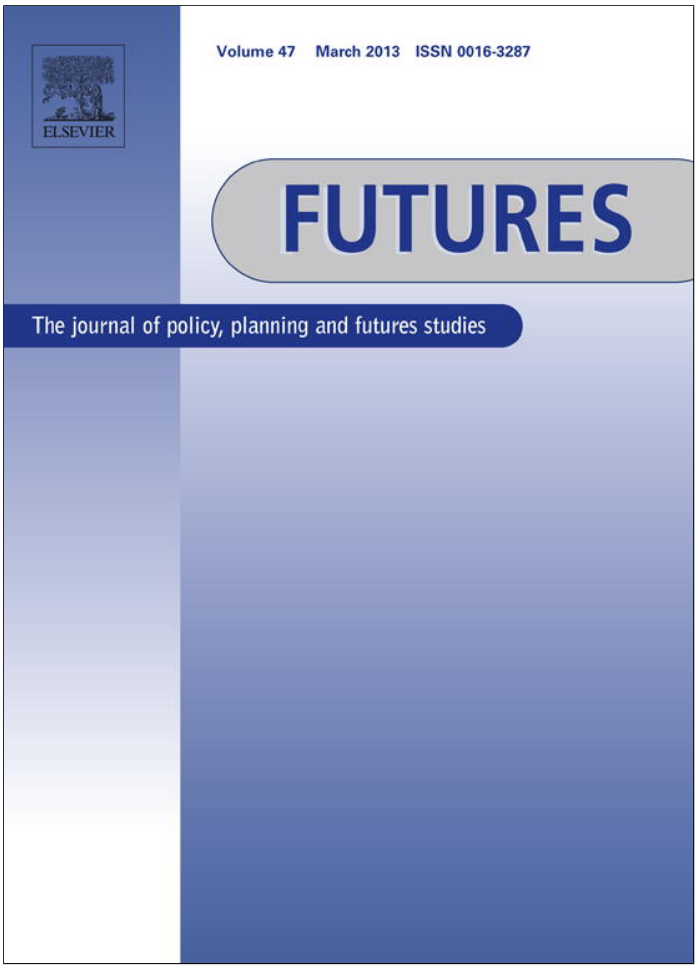

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Transmodernity: Integrating perspectives on societal evolution

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I engage with a broad range of literature that provides signals and evidence of an emerging and significant paradigm shift in human evolution. To describe this shift, different authors use a variety of terms, such as the transmodernity paradigm (Ghisi); the transmodern philosophy of political liberation (Dussel); the Hegelian dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Magda); the reflective/living-systems paradigm (Elgin); partnership model of caring economics (Eisler); relational global consciousness and biosphere politics (Rifkin); love ethics (hooks); and the circularity paradigm of interdependence (Steinem). Reviewing a broad range of perspectives, I will argue that the reason we do not hear more about the emerging socio-cultural, economic, political and philosophical shift described by these authors is because it is not centralised and coordinated under a single unifying name. Hence, I will offer the concept of transmodernity as an umbrella term that ropes together many concepts and tenets to communicate the overall idea of an emerging paradigm shift and the next step in human history.

1. Introduction

Currently, we can observe a whole range of futurist scenarios emerge from a variety of fields. These range from 'softer' questions of environmental sustainability to more radical arguments that humanity is in danger of collective death (e.g. [1–3]). However, at the level of public discourse, the questions and 'solutions' are often still framed within the existing (modern) economic and political framework, which sees rationality, money and technology as the most dominant measures of progress and human development. On the other hand, many social scientists, economists, political activists, writers, spiritual leaders and entrepreneurs argue that humanity needs (and is actually going through) a major global mind change and paradigm shift.

Some authors, notably Marc Luyckx Ghisi, Enrique Dussel, and Couze Venn speak of this shift through the notion of transmodernity. I aim to provide the reader with two things; firstly, an overview of the main tenets of this concept of transmodernity, in which I trace the commonalities between the different notions that the term offers for a promising move towards a new era for humanity. Secondly, I offer a broader analysis of writings from the fields of critical economics, social anthropology and psychology, cultural studies, political science and social activism that – although not intentionally – echo (aspects of) the transmodern paradigm shift. Given the constraints of this paper, I am of course acutely aware that my discussion will remain at the level of a general overview, which always runs the risk of oversimplifying the complex aspects that will be displayed. Nevertheless, my motivation is to propose a new utilisation of the transmodern(ity) concept as an umbrella term that connotes an emerging socio-cultural, economic, political and philosophical shift. Hence, I will argue that

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the concept of transmodernity can act as a medium to convey what appears to be a single message: 'Humanity finds itself, once again, at a crossroad between a dying old order and the rise of a new age' [4, p. 181].

2. Transmodernity: different perspectives

My first encounter with the term transmodernity occurred during a conference in Finland in 2006, where Marc Luyckx Ghisi presented a keynote [3] based on his book *Au-dela de la modernité du patriarchat et du capitalisme: La société réenchantée?*[1] [5]. Encouraged to investigate the notion further, I embarked on a fascinating journey of exploration that proved to be purely fascinating and has not stopped since. I soon came to understand that the notion of transmodernity has been arising from several fields of inquiry over the last 20 years.

To my knowledge, the term was first coined by the Spanish philosopher and feminist Rosa Maria Rodriguez Magda in her essay *La Sonrisa de Saturno: Hacia una teoria transmoderna*[2] [6]. Magda uses the term transmodernity to analyse and contrast current trends and consequences of globalisation to their historical counterparts. For her, transmodernity represents a globalised culture of interconnectedness, participation and emancipation, in which cosmopolitanism transcends universality by spreading differences beyond their traditional location [7].

In developing another notion of transmodernity, Marc Ghisi speaks from the capacity of a Belgian theologian, philosopher and researcher on global cultural transformation who worked in the 'Forward Studies Unit' of the European Commission. For Ghisi [3,8,9], the concept of transmodernity primarily relates to the emergence of a new paradigm of the world which communicates certain underlying values that humans rely on to make their judgments and decisions in all areas of their activities – economy, politics and everyday life. Ghisi continues to explain that a *transmodern* way of thinking is now emerging, as our hope for a desperately needed and newly reconstructed vision, after the endless postmodern (albeit necessary) deconstructions of modernity, which left intellectuals in rubble quite neatly captured by Rifkin:

> If post-modernists razed the ideological walls of modernity and freed the prisoners, they left them with no particular place to go. We became existential nomads, wandering through a boundaryless world full of inchoate longings in a desperate search for something to be attached to and believe in. While the human spirit was freed up from old categories of thought, we are each forced to find our own paths in a chaotic and fragmented world that is even more dangerous than the all-encompassing one we left behind [4, p. 5].

According to Ghisi then, the very concept of *transmodern* implies that the best of modernity is kept while at the same time we go beyond it. As such, it is not a linear projection which takes us from (pre)modernity via postmodernity to transmodernity; rather, it transcends modernity in that it takes us trans, i.e. through, modernity into another state of being, 'from the edge of chaos into a new order of society' [10, p. 2].

This argument very much reflects the meaning of the term as put forward by Magda [6], who uses Hegelian logic whereby Modernity, Postmodernity and Transmodernity form a dialectic triad that completes a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. As expressed in her own words: 'the third tends to preserve the defining impetus of the first yet is devoid of its underlying base: by integrating its negation the third moment reaches a type of specular closure' [6, p. 13]. In other words, transmodernism is critical of modernism and postmodernism while at the same time drawing elements from each. In a way it is a return to some form of absolute 'logic' that goes beyond the Western ideology and tries to connect the human race to a new shared story, which can be called *a global relational consciousness* [4].

A third author known for his use of the term transmodernity is the Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel, who speaks from a postcolonial neo-Marxist perspective, and associates transmodernity with a logical extension of his Philosophy of Liberation [11]. Although there are many similarities, Dussel's view of transmodernity is somewhat different from Ghisi's admittedly Eurocentric perspective. While Ghisi departs from a point of mainly Western socio-cultural and historical analysis, Dussel and his followers take epistemological, philosophical and political aspects of transmodernity as a starting point to unsettle Eurocentric coloniality. Dussel sees the potentiality in transmodernity to move us beyond traditional dichotomies; to articulate a critical cosmopolitanism beyond nationalism and colonialism; to produce knowledge beyond third world and Eurocentric fundamentalisms; to produce radical post-capitalist politics beyond identity politics; to overcome the traditional dichotomy between the political economy and cultural studies and to move beyond economic reductionism and culturalism [12].

Couze Venn, a British cultural theorist who has written extensively on occidentalism and modernity, also associates transmodernity with cosmopolitanism, albeit not motivated by technological, economic, or military interests, but by an understanding of humanity's debt to the world and a non-Eurocentric and non-appropriative imperative of emancipation [13]. For him, the notion of transmodernity is intimately related to postcolonialism, or rather, transcolonialism. Venn argues that modernity arose together with colonialism, and that transmodernity therefore would need to leave behind all exploitations associated with colonialism, including capitalism, patriarchalism, and racism [13].

What is interesting to note is that all the authors mentioned above seem to use the term transmodernity without reference to each other's writings, which suggests that the term was actually coined in synchronous fashion. It is my aim here

[1] In translation: 'Beyond modernity, patriarchy and capitalism: Re-enchanted society?'
[2] In translation: 'Saturn's Smile: Towards a transmodern theory.'

to attempt to synthesise the theoretical notions of these authors, and to show how 'transmodernity' could be used as an umbrella term for certain shifts occurring in society. Importantly, my desire to propose this more expansive way of thinking about transmodernity is not motivated only by intellectual interest, but out of a genuine conviction that a unifying name is needed to render hopeful and positive societal movements more visible, effective and compelling [14].

2.1. Locating the shifts

Ghisi [3,5] makes reference to numerous scientists and leading governance representatives who have been advocating a need for change long ago before Al Gore made his fame with the Inconvenient Truth. For example, in 1992 over 1600 senior scientists, including a majority of the living Nobel laureates in the sciences, signed and released a document entitled *Warning to Humanity* in which they stated the need for fresh approaches to thinking and living in order to stop the collision course of human beings and the natural world [15]. Dussel is also concerned about the forces of modernity that are destroying the planet and along with it humankind [16]; 'The three malaises of modernity (individualism, the primacy of instrumental reason or technological capitalism, and the despotism of the system), produce a loss of meaning, an eclipse of ends, and a loss of freedom in bureaucratised societies' [17, p. 142], and the capitalistic emphasis on 'profit, private appropriations and personal benefits' [16, p. 491] needs to be replaced with transmodern planetary interconnectedness and mutuality.

When it comes to 'indicators' for the shift towards transmodernity, Ghisi conceptualises five levels of current societal change [5], which he relates with an 'iceberg metaphor' of global human (un)consciousness and (un)awareness. Like the submerged parts of an iceberg floating in the sea, Ghisi's 'lower' levels of societal change are the least visible to humanity. The first level is at the darkest and coldest bottom where our global civilization finds itself today, at the edge of unsustainability and what Ghisi describes as the 'slow death' and collective suicide of humanity. The next higher level relates to the death of 'command, control and conquest' patriarchal values which have turned the world into a competitive and territorial battleground. Level three refers to the death of modernity as a dominant paradigm through which we see the world as an objective reality rooted in impartial truth. Level four refers to the death of the industrial type of businesses and decline of the material economy, while level five concerns the overall crisis of overly bureaucratic and pyramidal institutions.

As we will see, for Dussel, the shift towards transmodernity is intimately linked with the process of de-colonialisation and intercultural dialogue. Dussel shows that ancient cultures are presently reaffirming their roots in a trans-modern cultural response to our contemporary challenges [18]. Moreover, he argues that this same process of self-affirmation is taking place in regional European cultures (such as the Galician, Catalan, Basque, and Andalusian cultures in Spain; the Mezzogiorno in Italy; the Bavarians in Germany; and the Scottish, Irish), and in the minorities of the United States, especially the Afro-American and Hispanic cultures [19]. In this, he sees great hope for the future, as the irrupting diversity of perspectives carries a rich pluriversity that can create authentic intercultural dialogue [18,20]. Such dialogue, by creating a trans-modern pluriverse, could 'propose novel and necessary answers for the anguishing challenges that the Planet throws upon us at the beginning of the twenty-first century' [18, p. 18].

> Like the tropical jungles with their immense quantity of plants and animals genetically essential for the future of humanity, the majority of humanity's cultures excluded by modernity [...] and by globalization [...] retains an immense capacity for and reserve of cultural invention essential for humanity's survival. This creativity will also be needed if humanity is to redefine its relationship with nature based on ecology and interhuman solidarity, instead of reductively defining it on the solipsistic and schizoid criterion of increasing rates of profit [19, p. 234–235].

Furthermore, Dussel agrees with Magda [7] that increasing globalisation [19] and the availability of information technology [20] are driving the emergence of transmodernity, as both enable us to instantaneously receive news about other cultures and respond with ethical judgement. As examples of social movements that are working towards replacing unjust modern practices with ethical alternatives, Dussel cites, for example, the Zapatist National Liberation Army in Mexico, the Sin Tierra movement in Brazil, the cocaleros coca growers in Bolivia, and the piqueteros – the unemployed – in Argentina, as well as groups that fight for the rights of workers, women, homosexuals, immigrants, and older people [16].

Interestingly, Dussel's examples imply that the project of transmodernity is not necessarily realised through a peaceful, non-violent trajectory. To this, Venn would agree, as he highlights, with reference to Hardt and Negri's [21] *Empire*, that the newest attempt at Western world-domination through neoliberally informed democratisation and 'liberation' is provoking a Fourth World War of counter-movements that violently assert Other idea(l)s [22]. Furthermore, the current paradox of a global political economy that is torn between hegemonic enforcement of democratic and neoliberal values and a the call for respecting human rights and creating intercultural dialogue reflects the long opposition between mechanical philosophy and its belief in a 'disenchanted universe available for utilitarian appropriation' on the one hand, and vitalism on the other, which posits a dynamic symbiosis, a governance over the natural order; humans included [13]. Similarly, Featherstone [23] reminds us that the ideal of a planetary humanism is seen by some as an extension of Eurocentric humanism and universalistic authority, while others believe that intercultural sensitivity and understanding can become possible. At this point, I shall acknowledge that in this elaboration on the beginnings of a transmodern paradigm and social order I belong to the latter category.

2.2. Transmodernity – characteristics of the new paradigm

Ghisi's work [3,5,8,9,24] elaborates on a range of characteristics that describe the shift towards a transmodern society. He describes transmodernity as a *planetary vision* in which humans are beginning to realise that we are all (including plants and animals) connected into one system, which makes us all interdependent, vulnerable and responsible for the Earth as an indivisible living community. In that sense transmodernity is *actively tolerant and genuinely democratic* by definition, as the awareness of mutual interdependency grows and the hierarchies between different cultures dismantle. According to Ghisi, transmodernity is also essentially *postpatriarchal* in a sense that women's visions and intuitions are to be recognised as indispensable in order to invent together innovative urgent solutions. This is radically different from the (preceding and necessary) (post)modern feminist movements that fight for women's rights only. Rather it is about a joint effort of men and women to fight for the better world of tomorrow by rejecting values of control and domination. Transmodernity is also essentially *postsecular*, defining new relations between religions and politics in a way that re-enchants the world towards a new openness to spiritual guidance as a basis for 'private' behaviour and 'public' policy, whilst rejecting religious divisions and dogmas. In other words, transmodernity is characterised by openness for transcendental and sacred aspects of life, while resisting any authoritarian imposition of religious certainty. Moreover, transmodernity opposes the endless economic progress and obsession with material wealth and instead promotes the concept of *quality of life* as the measure of progress. For Ghisi, this is expressed in the form of the knowledge economy which moves the emphasis from material capital to intangible assets and the nourishment of human capital [9].

In this respect, transmodernity also moves away from vertical authority towards 'flatter', more 'horizontal' organisations; away from 'recommendations-up-orders-down' management and towards more *consensual decision-making* [8, p. 3]. It downsizes the concept of clergy, technocrats and experts in order to raise the self-awareness, self-knowledge and individual accountability of all. It promotes *Earth citizenship* and draws from the highest potentials of humanity. It redefines the relation between science, ethics and society to reach for real and radical *transdisciplinarity*.

Yet, transmodernity is not a universalist project, as *global reconciliation* around a sustainable future and a broad range of cultural diversity are part of the transmodern vision, which claims that each community or region needs to be free to develop in ways that are uniquely suited to its culture, ecology, climate and other characteristics. As such, transmodernity offers a powerful path to peace and a new platform of dialogue between world cultures.

While Ghisi mainly concerns himself with describing the characteristics of the emerging paradigm shift, Dussel's central argument revolves around the role of intercultural dialogue in bringing about and defining the shift towards transmodernity. Granted, Ghisi does note certain underlying forces that he considers are driving transmodern changes, among them the inability of reductionist capitalism to respond effectively to increasingly challenging global problems, and the transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge society. However, for Dussel, genuine dialogue across all cultures is needed in order for transmodernity to transcend Eurocentrism. Let me clarify that Ghisi also sees intercultural dialogue as central to transmodernity, however, it seems as though to him it is an aspect, rather than the driving force of the transmodern paradigm shift, as it is for Dussel.

In order to understand this claim, it is necessary to briefly outline Dussel's preceding argument: In his revealing historical analysis [c.f. 17], he locates the origins of modernity in the Iberian peninsula, starting with the invasion of the Americas from 1492, which resulted in Europe being able to place itself at the 'centre', while the rest of the world became a 'periphery'. However, the singularity of modernity can be challenged by acknowledging the existence of alternative projects of modernity in Japan, India, and the Arab world that arose more or less simultaneously with the dominant Euro-American version [25]. Indeed, Dussel shows later [18,19] that it was not until the Industrial Revolution that Europe gained a 'relative advantage' large enough to exert its hegemony over other highly developed cultures of the time – such as China and Hindustan [19]. Given this relatively short timeframe of only 200 years, he continues, European hegemony was unable to fully suppress most of the value structures of ancient cultures, like the Chinese and cultures of the Far East, the Hindustanic, the Islamic, the Russian-Byzantine, and Latin American cultures [18,19]. According to Dussel, these ancient cultures hold 'enough human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality that will emerge after modernity and capitalism' [19, p. 234].

Importantly, Dussel warns that (subconscious) Eurocentrism currently pervades all cultural arenas, European and non-European [19], which makes genuine multiculturalism and dialogue – as opposed to sterile participation that follows Western procedural principles – a difficult endeavour [18]. Therefore, the dialogue needs to take place amongst cultures of the 'South' as well as between the South and the North [18,20]. Richard Nisbett's [26] work on geographies of thought is interesting to consider at this point, as it shows how the recent 'Western' leaps of insight towards seeing the world as an interconnected whole (also evident in the so-called systems approach) have historically been characteristic to Eastern ways of thinking and their religious manifestation in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Hence, Eastern peoples and countries might actually be better suited than Europeans to create intercultural dialogues, and eventually network governance, transnational spaces and a relational global consciousness.

Avoiding any predefined suppositions about specific voices in intercultural dialogue, however, Dussel [18,20] continues to argue that genuine transversal dialogue needs to occur between the culture's critical innovators, who argue from the 'border' between their culture and modernity, and who, rather than simply defend their culture, recreate it by critically evaluating both their own and modernity's cultural tradition. As a starting point, Dussel recommends certain 'core' philosophical questions, which, while they can be expressed in different ways by different cultures, may still serve as bridges for a dialogue around human universal problems [20].

In a similar vein, another scholar, Sardar [10] sees the positive potentiality of the transmodern world to bridge what appears currently the impassable gap between Islam and the West due to the concept of 'tradition' as an idée fixe of western society. He shows how transmodern tenets of consensual politics and modalities for adjusting to change are at very heart of Islam. Yet he warns us that in developing a transmodern framework for open discussions it is important to think of the Muslim world beyond the strait jackets of either ultra-modernist or ultra traditionalist governments (neither of whom have any understanding of transmodernism) and involve ordinary people instead – activists, scholars, writers, journalists, etc. In doing so, Sardar [10] argues we will discover that most people have critical but positive attitudes towards the West; and women will be as willing, if not more so, to participate in such discussions and the transformations they may initiate, as men. He is of the opinion that if the West shift towards transmodernism, the involvement of the public will open up great new possibilities for positive change and fruitful synthesis which would replace homogenising globalization with a more harmonious and enriching experience of human life.

Returning to Dussel's work, it is evident that he is in agreement with Ghisi and Magda in that transmodernity forms a dialectic triad with modernity and post-modernity. Post-modernity – which is in Dussel's view still inherently Eurocentric, as it has rather paradoxically reinforced the process of 'Othering' by further demarcation of difference and identity politics – has served to raise critical consciousness and general respect for difference [16,19], so that humanity is ready to subsume 'the best of globalised European and North American modernity [. . .] in order to develop a new civilization for the twenty-first century' [19, p. 224]. Instead of being dominated by it, transmodernity is in constant dialogue with modernity [16]. For instance, the best of the modern technological revolution should be adopted, while discarding anti-ecological aspects [19]. Furthermore, the focus on instrumental reason which characterised modernity should not simply be abandoned, but subordinated to ethical principles and 'put at the service of the dignity and freedom of all the members of the community' [16, p. 504].

Venn is also in accordance with the notion of transmodernity as a dialectic triad. Specifically, he argues that a transmodern project should re-invigorate the Enlightenment tenets of equality, emancipation, justice, and becoming, albeit with a critical rejection of the modern and neoliberal (mis)interpretation of these ideals [25]. Venn's argument shows that such philosophical and ethical ideals of the Enlightenment period were – however unintendedly – corrupted by the progressively dominant secular-rationalist and instrumental purposive thrust that was in alliance with capitalism and colonialism. What further complicates the trajectory towards transmodernity is that modernity and postmodernity both still see development as a linear temporal sequence, in which newness is judged as inherently better, without any assessment against the ideals of emancipation towards equality and ethical maturity as originally understood by the Enlightenment's vision [25]. Instead, the neoliberal beacons of efficiency and productivity have become the yardstick, and by definition, 'developing' countries need to keep playing 'catch up'.

Stating that our current turbulent social realities remind of the conditions present during the emergence of the Enlightenment [25], Venn calls for a fundamental re-thinking of the principles on which we build our (future) societies, and an interrogation of international institutions of sovereignty regarding their responsibility to human rights and the shaping of history [13].

3. Harnessing the power of transmodernity

> 'Dreams require optimism, a sense that one's hopes can be fulfilled'
> [4, p. 384]

What is the added value of this discussion to the notion of transmodernity? Clearly, the authors I have reviewed here invest a certain amount of hope into the emergence of a transmodern society that can deal more holistically and ethically with the challenges we face at the beginning of the 21st century. In my own research across a broad variety of fields, I discovered that many theoretical notions and emerging practices call for different efforts of societal and private engagement and echo the notion of transmodernity. These voices come from a range of perspectives and tend to focus on a particular aspect of the transmodern paradigm shift, such as changes in socio-cultural demographics, societal consciousness and psycho-social evolution, (political) economy, ethics, and academic practice.

For instance, the phenomenon of the 'silent revolution' led by a growing number of so-called 'cultural creatives' [27–29], 'who create new values and who, without knowing it, are activating the 21st century paradigm' [9, p. 158] is pointing to emerging *shifts in socio-cultural demographics.* This concept of the silent revolution of 'creative marginals' comes from the historian Arnold Toynbee who analysed the rise and fall of 23 civilisations in world history and who claims that when a culture shift occurs, usually 5% of the population are preparing the shift in silence. The sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson applied this concept in 13 years of research and discovered that around 24% of Americans are departing from traditional or modern cultures to weave new ways of life. They label this new subculture as the 'Cultural Creatives', who deeply care about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, peace, social justice, self actualisation, spirituality and self-expression. These cultural creatives are activists and volunteers – more so than other Americans, reflect on themselves, and are seriously looking for a spiritual dimension in life that goes beyond religious dogmas. Interestingly, 66% in this group are women [29]. On other shores, the Statistics Office of the European Commission (Eurostat) confirmed

that approximately 20% of the European population exhibit a set of values similar to the cultural creatives [30], and in his latest work, Ghisi [9] also provides numerous anecdotal evidence that shows how this trend is quietly spreading throughout Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

On the basis of another independent world-wide survey, Duane Elgin similarly suggests the emergence of a new paradigm and *global shift in consciousness*. In his Millenium Project Report [15], Elgin provides many indicators that suggest a newly emerging worldview, which he calls a reflective/living-systems paradigm. He derives his claims from a comprehensive overview of many 'cultural transformation and paradigm' publications by eminent scientists and world leaders as well as empirical evidence of world statistics on global ecological awareness, behavioural trends, emerging social values and sustainable ways of living. He also cites much interesting research on world wide web technology, which he claims has the revolutionary capacity to connect and awaken humanity to larger evolutionary possibilities by creating a global awareness (to the same effect as the printing press progressed the oral culture of mediaeval ages to revolutionise and create the world commerce of modernity). Notably, Elgin's claims expand upon Ronald Inglehart's writings on postmodern societal change should be [31] and his World Values Survey, which indicated an intergenerational value shift and increased focus on meaning and purpose of life in advanced industrial societies [32] as well as less 'developed' countries [33]. Finally, Elgin concludes that the reflective/living systems paradigm may be pointing towards the emergence of an 'integral culture'[3]:

> As we develop our capacity for reflective consciousness and knowing connection, we can achieve a higher level of integration and balance among the polarities that pull at our lives – inner and outer, masculine and feminine, collective and individual, and so on. With its inclusive and reconciling nature, an integral perspective offers the hope that the human family will overcome its many differences and work together to build a sustainable, satisfying, and soulful future. ...In shifting paradigms, we shift from feelings of existential isolation in a lifeless cosmos, to experiencing profound connections in a living universe [15, p. 21].

On the level of *psycho-social evolution*, these shifts in societal consciousness may be related to the British philosopher Owen Barfield's view of history as an unfolding of human consciousnesses [34]. Barfield divides the history of human societies into three rough stages, which dovetail with Freud's theory of individual mental development. In the first stage of hunter-gatherer societies, humans had little sense of self and regarded Mother Earth as a primordial mother, treating her with the same love, respect and awe as they might confer on their own tribal mothers (similar to the infant-mother relationship when the infant still feel oneness with her/his Mother).

The beginning of agriculture, according to Barfield, marked the onset of the second great period of human consciousnesses, when humans in their activities of domestication of animals and land slowly began to lose the intimate communion with the natural world. This phase is comparable to the adolescent stage in psychoanalysis, when the void left by the sense of separation and loss of bodily connection with our mother is compensated with endless substitutes – material things, ideologies, unconditional love of God, sex, various addictions – you name it. The general unhappiness and status anxieties [35] of the (post)modern era become more explicable in light of a statement given by the psychologist Norman Brown [36, p. 297; 4, p. 373]: 'the more the life of the body passes into things, the less life there is in the body, and at the same time the increasing accumulation of things represents an ever fuller articulation of the lost life of the body'.

Barfield suggests, however, that we are on the cusp of a third stage of human consciousness – the stage in which we make a self-aware choice to re-participate with the body of nature. In this new relational consciousness we are increasingly becoming aware of shared risk and vulnerability, and economic, social and environmental interdependencies, leading to the emergence of process-oriented behaviour and a willingness to accept contradicting realities and multicultural perspectives.

In many ways, Barfield's view is in line with Eisler's [37] evolutionary theory of human development from ancient, matrifocal times, via the domination system of patriarchy to the emerging partnership model between men and women; nature and humans; mind, body and soul. Hence, the current era brings about a maturity through which we realise that we need to stop denying our own mortality (a response characteristic of the adolescent sense of invincibility), since we can't really begin to live until we accept the inevitability of our own death. Or as Venn puts it;

> the knowledge that we exist as beings in time makes time itself the highest, irreducible, value, so that respect for the time of the other should be the modality in which responsibility for the other can be generalised in the public sphere [13, p. 78].

In other words, it is through taking non-reciprocal responsibility towards the other, through showing unconditional solicitude and care that we can create transmodern social realities [13].

But how do we come to terms with the fact of death *and* make the choice to live?

Following Rifkin's advice, one should make a

[3] According to Paul Ray (1996) 'Integral culture' is a concept that was initially discussed more than 50 years ago by the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, the cultural analyst Jean Gebser and the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo, while the later works on integral culture can be found in the writings of the philosopher Ken Wilber.

> self-aware decision to leave the death instinct behind, to no longer seek mastery, control, or domination over nature, including human nature, as a means of fending off death. Instead, accept death as part of life and make a choice to re-participate with the body of nature. Cross over from the self to the other, and reunite in an empathetic bond with the totality of relationships that together make up the Earth's indivisible living community [4, p. 374].

On a more pragmatic level of political economy, the renowned macrohistorian[4] and evolutionary theorist Riane Eisler provides evidence of *emerging economic and political models* that manifest the transmodern shift. Based on her work over the last 20 years, Eisler conceives of the 'partnership' and the 'domination' system as two possibilities for structuring beliefs, institutions and relations that transcend categories such as religious vs. secular, right vs. left, and developed vs. underdeveloped. It is her particularly brilliant *The Chalice and the Blade* [37], an insightful historical analysis spanning over 30,000 years, that provides an enlightening perspective on our past and the 'givens' in all areas of our personal, communal, economic and political life. With reference to archaeological discoveries, Eisler shows that ancient times (before 3500 BC) were based on matrifocal values, which, rather than implying the domination of women over men, pertain to forms of societal organisation that focused on the values of giving life, fertility, the pleasure to exist, artistic creation and sexual pleasure. However, Eisler continues, over time, the life-generating and nurturing 'feminine' powers of the chalice (or grail) were replaced by the lethal power of the blade. In the patriarchal world that emerged, and of which we are the last heirs, 'power' is no longer viewed as the ability to give life, but is construed as the power to bring death, destroy life, subdue others and be obeyed at all cost. In light of these historical developments, Eisler for instance deconstructs the patriarchal imagery of 'original sin' and the beginning of Genesis in the Bible as a text that represents the shift from the 'old' matrifocal symbols to the patriarchal myth in which the tree of life and wisdom becomes an evil and the sacred Eros between man and woman becomes the 'shameful act'.

In her deconstruction of the long history of domination, Eisler provides a beacon for our world tired of mistrust, blood, misery and injustice. Transcending the trap of polarised thinking, she offers a way forward by pointing to the slowly emerging partnership model [38] in which feminine and masculine characteristics are regarded equally, leading to re-affirmation of values such as nurturance, caring and non-violence, and more egalitarian social structures. Furthermore, the partnership model affirms the spiritual dimension of life and links it with empathy, equity and love, and human relations that are held together by pleasure bonds rather than by fear of pain.

But rather than remaining in the realm of wishful thinking, Eisler's work provides an impressive range of international evidence of personal, communal and economic initiatives, organisations and policies that suggest that we are finally witnessing the world-wide movement towards a partnership system [14,38] of caring economics [39]. In her latest groundbreaking work [39] on the *Real Wealth of Nations* Eisler deconstructs Adam Smith's theory of the 'invisible hand of the market' as the best mechanism for producing and distributing the necessities of life to unpack its deep-seated culture of domination and exploitation that has devalued all activities which fall outside of the market's parameters of buying and selling. Instead she proposes that a slowly emerging 'caring economics' takes into account the full spectrum of economic activities of the household, from the life enriching activities of caregivers and communities to the life-supporting processes of nature. In juxtaposition to the overwhelming evidence of structural inequalities and social injustices of the domination system, she provides evidence of and many proposals for new economic practices – new measures, policies, and rules – to bring about a caring economics that fulfils human needs. In the many examples given, such as high-quality care for children, she also uses a purely financial cost-benefit analysis to demonstrate how caring is one of the best investments a nation can make.

Eisler's claims are further supported by the fact that many mainstream businesses are now questioning their purpose, and move from a purely profit driven 'bottom-line' existence to the inclusion of spiritual values and working for the common good in their mission [c.f. 40–43].

Jeremy Rifkin, a renowned economist and advisor to the heads of state in Europe and the United States, goes one step further, claiming that the 'European dream of a United Europe' is (in its potentiality) already a political manifestation of the partnership era Eisler speaks of:

> The new European dream is powerful because it dares to suggest a new history, with an attention to the quality of life, sustainability, and peace and harmony. In a sustainable civilization, based on quality of life rather than unlimited individual accumulation of wealth, the very material basis of modern progress would be a thing of the past. . .The new dream is focused not on amassing wealth but rather, on elevating the human spirit. The European dream seeks to expand human empathy, not territory. It takes humanity out of the materialist prison in which it has been bound since the early days of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and into the light of a new future motivated by idealism [4, p. 7–8].

In the light of many EU controversies, hypocrisies and problems, Rifkin's claims could easily be accused of being 'overtly idealistic'. However, he stresses that dreams reflect hopes, not achievements; hence the notion of the *potentiality* in many of

[4] Riane Eisler is the author of the international bestseller The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future, which has been published in 23 foreign editions, making Riane the only woman to be selected as one of 20 great thinkers (including people like Hegel, Marx and Toynbee) for inclusion in Macrohistory and Macrohistorians.

the tenets provided by the ideal of European dream. Rifkin shows how the fundamental pillars of the modern era (individualism; the capitalist market-exchange economy; the ideology of property; and territory-bound-nation-state governance) are slowly getting replaced with new spatial, economic, social and political arrangements of the global era.

Rifkin's ideas about the potentiality of Europe tie in with Ulrich Beck's [44] argument that pressing global risks are leading to increased sensitivity to global interconnectedness and confrontation with the other. According to Beck, the imperative of cosmopolitanism then is to create a trans-national politics of greening modernity, with a vision to emancipate human societies towards alternative definitions of wealth in terms of overall 'wellbeing', equality, freedom for individual expression. Naturally, this involves the creation of new institutions, and ways of production and consumption.

> Those who think exclusively in national terms are the losers. Only those who learn to see the world through cosmopolitan eyes will be able to avoid the decline on the one hand, and, on the other, to discover, try out and acquire the new options and opportunities for power which could make a difference [44, p. 264].

By providing an overview of the historical making of a united Europe and its political architecture of extra-territorial governance, Rifkin paints an honest picture of Europe's many hypocrisies and contradictions, yet also points to its many achievements and potentialities for advancing greater interconnectedness and mutuality, and a relational global consciousness. Focussing on this positive outlook, let me review some of Rifkin's [4] main arguments. He argues, for instance, that the burgeoning network of commerce and the 'immateriality' of the knowledge economy are giving birth to a new economic system based on cooperative commerce of reciprocity and trust, since 'markets are based on the pursuit of self-interest, networks on shared interest' [4, p. 193]. Second, Rifkin highlights the role of three-sector politics that include civil society alongside the two poles of market and government, and which make the European dream realisable, as CSOs represent the social engine to preserve diversity while mobilising public support for agendas such as universal human rights. Third, he argues that the EU policy of the *precautionary principle* for regulating innovations in science and technology is successfully being used to prevent potential dangers to the health of humans and the environment, which points to an emergent respect for Earth as an interconnected whole – while acknowledging that the old paradigm of growth, exploitation and colonisation still pervades.

Overall, Rifkin's analysis of changes at the European level is a call to move from the current *geopolitics* – and its assumption that the environment is a giant battleground where we all fight for our survival – to *biosphere* politics, or the premise of the Earth as a living organism made up of interdependent relationships on which we all can only survive by stewarding the larger communities of which we are a part.

In a similar vein, Hird [45] argues that while humans may endanger their own survival and that of other animals, the biosphere at large with its multiplicity of organisms, will hardly be destroyed. Hence, we may need a notion of globality that is not human-centred; that recognises the relative insignificance of our own kind. It may be possible, that such an understanding of biospheric globality might lead to a broader realisation that 'all reality is political, but not all politics is human [46], and in turn to a more humble engagement with each other and our surroundings.

In his latest book [47], *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*, Rifkin elaborates on this call to become more oriented towards mutuality and interconnectedness by providing a historical analysis of empathy, showing that humans are fundamentally empathic beings, and that society has become increasingly empathic throughout history. Referring to the beginning of biosphere consciousness, this latest book asks whether we can 'reach global empathy in time to avoid the collapse of civilization and save the Earth' [47, p. 3].

From the field of feminist writings comes another echo of transmodernity, this time with an emphasis on the *ethics of mutuality*. What Gloria Steinem calls the circularity paradigm [48,49] resonates very much with what has been elaborated above:

> If we think of ourselves as circles, our goal is completion – not defeating others. Progress lies in the direction we haven't been. . .Progress is appreciation. If we think of work structures as circles, excellence and cooperation are the goal – not competition. Progress becomes mutual support and connectedness. If we think of nature as a circle, then we are part of its reciprocity. Progress means interdependence. If we respect nature and each living thing as a microcosm of nature – then we respect the unique miracle of ourselves. And so we have come full circle [48, p. 189–190].

The realisation that human powers come from within has been translated into the political arena, producing a socio-political movement of 'sacred activism', which reaffirms individual growth, spirituality and actions that counter contemporary global discourses of fear, alienation and disempowerment [e.g. 50–54]. This idea and practice of sacred activism is also related to the poststructural concept of embodiment [55–57], which encourages practitioners and professionals of any kind to engage with subtle norms and values that shape their lives. In the process of such reflective embodied practice, the normalised discourses of dehumanised structures and the resisting power of agency can be revealed simultaneously, leading not only to insight and personal growth, but also to empowerment.

Another transmodern impetus related to mutuality is that of love ethics, which has been put forward particularly by Bell Hooks [58–60], who conceptualises love as going beyond the exceptional-individual phenomenon. Instead, love ethics are about a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet.

Hooks urges both men and women to challenge the patriarchal culture of lovelessness, sexist stereotypes and dehumanisation and to engage in the art of loving for themselves and their universal humanity.

In the anticipation of criticism by political economy pessimists that my inclusion of love ethics is this discussion of social shifts is rather naive, I want to clarify that coming from an academic background of neo-Marxist geography, I cannot deny the overwhelming evidence of structural inequalities and lovelessness around the globe. However, I have also learned to agree with Gloria Steinem and Bell Hooks who argue that marking oppressed difference creates a mindset of victimisation, which seriously affects personal and collective confidence, and hence subtly reproduces further marginalisation. So in my hope that we can truly remake the world, I opt to focus on signs that signal a potential shift in collective consciousness. Considering the plethora of pessimistic views and bad news, I leave that (admittedly important) job to others and commit myself to trace and discover what is positive and possible in our human development potential.

Translating and applying love ethics to the area in which academics can most obviously contribute to social change – their teaching, Hooks promotes the notion of 'democratic educators' and a pedagogy of hope [60], urging educators to resist oppressive structures by exposing their dehumanisation, and to embrace instead values that motivate progressive social change – spirit, struggle, service, love, and shared learning. This call has been taken up by some, an example of which is the *academy of hope* [c.f. 61, 62], which advocates a reflexive and critically hopeful turn in academic research and practice, tracing positive structures, changes and potentialities that can provide models for acting in the personal and professional lives of academics [61,64,65]. Furthermore, it aims to create a community of resistance in which to transgress oppressing teaching and research structures and ideologies that stifle creativity in research [c.f. 66, 67], promote collective fear of radical change, and entrench a culture of domination that ensures obedience [c.f. 61]. The academy of hope deconstructs the geo-body politics of academic knowledge and its deeply embedded destructive dichotomies and hierarchies of rational/emotional; feminine/masculine; subject/object; internal/external; mind/body/spirit; winner/loser; dominant/passive; man/nature; and agency/structure/resistance. However, it not only seeks to examine the world as it is, but to reflect on the world as we make it, proactively searching for strategies and practices to legitimise professional, emotional and spiritual responsibilities to those with whom and for whom we co-create knowledge, to students and also to ourselves.

4. Transmodernity: a unified name

In the process of my research, as I was engaging with the broader literature in the arts, humanities, social science and popular culture, so it often felt as though I was 'puzzling' and slowly discovering how different pieces connect. I don't believe in purely original ideas, and this project in particular seems to support the notion of *synchronicity* [68], whereby people are engaged in parallel intellectual universes around the globe and articulate related ideas, but often express them in different wor(l)ds and terminologies. With the preceding discussion, I hope to have shown that while many different labels and models exist to describe the global shift in culture, consciousness, society economics, politics, and human relations, they all point to the same intuitive aspirations for inclusivity, diversity, partnership, sacredness and quality of life, deep play, sustainability, universal human rights, the rights of nature and peace on Earth.

It is one thing to point to the emergence of the notion of transmodernity and similar ideas within different fields, but what I would like to propose here is that the shift towards a more ethical, inclusive, and respectful planetary society could be greatly assisted by creating a shared framework, a unified way of speaking about the new paradigm and its practices. As Eisler asserts, the reason why we do not hear much in the media about the movement(s) I have described here, is because it is not centralised and coordinated under a single unifying name and: 'without a name, it's almost as if it didn't exist, despite all the progress around us' [14,p. xxi]. I therefore propose to adopt 'transmodern(ity)' as an umbrella term to connote the small and large pieces of the puzzle that contribute to creating a (truly) brave new world. In this way, isolated islands of thought and action could find a common language to advance their efforts to co-create a more hopeful and positive future for humanity.

This call for a unified approach is not merely motivated by a wish to advance theory, but by my deeply felt desire to enlighten practice. Transmodernity gives us the necessary political and epistemological position to transcend all (post)essentialist contradictions and treatments of race, gender, tradition, culture, economy, etc., and to create a 'ground zero' of *biosphere politics* without inherent domination and superiority of one over another. Once the grounds of shared risk, vulnerability and interconnectedness of all humans occupying our Earth are acknowledged; a true dialogue without patronisation can be created.

In conveying 'good news' however, I do not deny the harsh reality of structural inequalities around the world and my own privileged position in it – to speak, to write and to live comfortably. Yet, it wasn't always like that. As a person who experienced war and subsequent displacement, I encountered both random discrimination and beautiful human support. I can attest to the powers of positive mindset and human compassion that help one to empower and to get empowered, and in the light of my own experience, I want to promote values of wisdom, compassion, contribution. In doing so, I point to the possibilities of creating unity by celebrating diversity, which I believe represents the only way to the sustainable future of humanity.

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