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► **To cite this version:**

Alain Suberchicot. Why do cultures change?The challenges of globalization. Cultures in Transit, Jul 2008, Liverpool, United Kingdom. halshs-00308910

HAL Id: halshs-00308910

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00308910>

Submitted on 4 Aug 2008

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Why do cultures change ?
The challenges of globalization
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We are always in need of definitions whenever we want to explore why cultures change. We are pressed to come up with answers as to what culture might be and how the idea of culture might fit into a nutshell. The general applicability of the answer we struggle to devise invites theoretical formulas and abstraction from specific historical developments. It also, as a result, cautions us to choose fields from which to cull situations and conflicts that may help deliver the concepts we want to grasp, and invites to understand the theory of culture as shaped by how events unfold, and how society moves along. In particular, one may have in mind what the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote about Napoleon (our favourite dictator; to us French people) in a book he devoted to figures of historical importance (*Representative Men*): “Such a man was wanted, and such a man was born”¹. This strikes a negative note, as does a quote from Napoleon himself that Emerson has unearthed from the vast body of memoirs the Napoleon era has handed down to us. Emerson is reported to have once declared: “My hand of iron [...] was not at the extremity of my arm; it was immediately connected with my head”². The remark and the quote hold a tentative definition of culture. Culture begins when sheer force is mitigated by intellect, intellect itself being shaped by a response to facts, and, we hope, as Emerson hopes, abstracted from fact by ethical imperative. On all this, we feel Emerson’s attempt at rationality is run through by doubt: what if one might never discriminate between intellect and action? What if one might never grasp how ethics can disengage us from the cogs of history and was incapable of controlling an ongoing process that leads to disaster and apocalypse? Whenever one tries to define culture, culture breaks down into its many components: it splinters into action and responsibility, and we feel there might never be a connection between them. There lies Emerson’s historical pessimism, which it is hard to tone down.

In recent years, a debate has been brought to the foreground, for reasons that have to do with our increasingly globalizing world. Are there any values left? If such a thing as culture exists, then, there might be precise contents of an ethical sort that we want to pin down. Might not this sense of emptiness be the result of a crisis of value, as if the very idea of value had been swept away? This is what the French cultural critic Hubert Damisch thinks has happened, in a recent contribution to a volume aptly titled *Which Values for our Time*, published by the Gulbenkian Foundation of Lisbon. Damisch rounds up his interrogation as follows: “Crisis of values, or crisis value?”³ The suggestion is of course that value is no longer visible on the horizon of our history to be, that the trend should be resisted, and that intellectual resistance is what we need. It is by no means new to be aware, among philosophers and cultural critics alike, that values are hard to come by. In Plato’s *Republic*, book seven, humankind is looking at the walls of a cave, noting the shadows dancing there, and being taught that our poor sight precludes the perception of good and evil, and the difference between them. Now that the walls of the cave have turned into television screens, one image is chased away by the next one, while our sense of global responsibility dissolves into thin air even though all the fields of human action hold perspectives of responsibility in

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson « Napoleon ; or, the man of the world », *Essays and Lectures*, Joel Porte, ed., New York, The Library of America, 1983, 731.

² Emerson, 731.

³ Hubert Damisch, « A Crisis of Values, or Crisis Value ? », *Which Values for our Time*, Daniel S. Hamilton, ed., Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Center for Transatlantic Relations, The Johns Hopkins University, 2007, 57.

them. Culture, like values, is both a plenum and a void, a constant expectation and in the end an impossibility when one looks at results and facts.

We should keep in mind Jacques Derrida's anthropology of culture, and the degree to which it identifies conflict as the prime-mover within our cultural narratives. In a major contribution at a Cerisy conference in Normandy in 1980, titled "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy"⁴, Jacques Derrida opposes two sets of attitudes: seeking rationality, and seeking mystery. Derrida views culture as the competition between the *Aufklärer* and the mystics, and suggests there are possibilities that the two trends in cultural discourse might eventually reach some kind of truce achieved as a result of an interaction between them. No doubt he was trying to hold historical pessimism at a distance by suggesting gain might be reached in the historical development of cultures if rationality was capable of reading through the language of mysticism, and curb the influence of those he chose to call the mystagogues, in whom he saw a danger for democracy and human dignity. Cultures change, and when they do, they are pulled in opposite directions if we abide by Derrida's critical thinking. They change to eliminate reason, even, as Derrida puts it, to emasculate it, and we must, as a result, apply pressure to preserve amity, and to uphold the values of democracy. To be sure, Derrida's onslaught upon mystery is no onslaught upon religious values: there are many other targets we might think of in the current context of globalized liberal economies and environmental overuse, such as religious fundamentalism, terrorism, and the emergence of a global self-appointed élite, although Derrida's inquiry was started some thirty years ago, and he never gets that precise about what should be indicted.

Disaster and apocalypse

Our globalizing societies offer alternatives to an ideal world. In particular, market mechanisms and the rise of global capital have impoverished some non-European nations, while Europe has, in recent years, worked to thin the immigration flux while downsizing out of their jobs the low-skilled workers of a once predominantly industrial economy that has now turned to services. As a result, local communities have been struck, either in Europe or the United States, by being impoverished within the more glitzy context of affluence. In China as elsewhere, industrial activity has surged, while working conditions have never been worse among the former peasants driven to urban areas. Globalization may well pass for an agenda of disaster and social apocalypse, as Joseph Stiglitz has demonstrated⁵. Welfare and human rights have hardly benefited from the promise economic liberalism keeps harping on, and human development has been restricted to the rising middle-classes of China, or India, if we look at the most significant examples. Richard Rorty, meditating on social hope, has brought home the idea that globalization has been a blow to democracy. He wrote the following in an essay published in 1993: "We now have a global overclass which makes all the major economic decisions, and makes them in entire independence of the legislatures, and *a fortiori* of the will of the voters, of any given country"⁶. Rorty's remark comes as an apposite reminder that there is no such thing as a world government, a fact that we all tend to overlook. The ideology of economic growth heralds human development, but delivers little in terms of the strengthening of local communities, both in rising nations as well as in Western ones.

⁴ Peter Fenves, ed., *Raising the Tone of Philosophy ; Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 117-171; French edition: "D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie », *Les Fins de l'Homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., Paris, Galilée, 1981, 445-479.

⁵ See in particular *Making Globalization Work*, New York, Norton, [2006] 2007, chap. 7, "The Multinational Corporation".

⁶ Richard Rorty, « Globalization, the politics of identity and Social Hope », *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London, Penguin, 1999, 233.

Might not this ideology form the most recent embodiment of some pseudo-thinking the mystagogues parade as rationality for us to kneel to?

Communities, we hear, have gone global, which means they are now glocal. The portmanteau-word means more than it seems to say. On the one hand, the buzzword suggests that local communities may be strengthened by globalization; on the other, it suggests that local communities are shaped, in ways that cannot all be positive, by the advance of global liberalism. However, one of the unsought effects of glocalization may well be that cultural interference with distant or unknown communities might emerge from the pressure of global liberalism, by dissolving national, or even nationalist perspectives, and favouring international contacts. Let us be cautious in this: international interaction, in the context of globalizing economic exchange, may well be no other than buying and selling, and one more version of materialism without national values being cross-fertilized.

Globalization cannot control the rise of a new conservatism, in spite of the surge in optimism that comes with it in some quarters, if we look at the poor condition of welfare systems across developed countries and elsewhere. As Habermas has pointed out, “modernity sees itself as dependent exclusively upon itself”⁷, and utopian ideals are increasingly wiped out of the *Zeitgeist*. Globalization is in dire need of strengthening, not exhausting, utopian energies. If it proves incapable of effecting this, renewing utopian energies, the road down globalization may well be what one supposes it to be from recent evidence, a hurdle-race, with one winner, a few athletes of note, and vast crowds of anonymous losers. Jacques Derrida has pointed out that we need peace in culture, and that peace can be achieved when the mystagogues accept to interact with rationality. Rationality however, to him, is not an empty bottle, or an instrument by which societies may solve practical questions. Rationality involves moral choice, and one may well suggest that the Habermas notion that utopian ideals have to be upheld is the best way to reorder, and refashion global liberalism. No doubt, the culture wars must go on, to stay the current backlash and its related traumas, terrorism East and West, the political violence within national borders and without, the religious fundamentalism which has found in globalization its ecotope, in Israel, in the Arab world, in the United States, and elsewhere, while environmental disasters from North to South take their toll upon communities. Cultures, as a result of globalization, change, for reasons that have to do with the innate systemic risks that globalization runs through them, risks which are supra-human, but which, for that very reason, have to be identified, deconstructed, and eliminated, although we do know that this process cannot be the work of one sole generation. Indifference as well as naïveté ought to be avoided. If, as Habermas thinks they are, utopian values are used-up, because they are targeted, then, they must be invigorated.

No doubt any such invigoration, if we want it to have pragmatic efficiency, calls for specific measures, and precautions. Intellectual clarity can help. And meditation upon what is and what is not scientific can be an asset. It is true odium has been cast on the precautionary principle by some scholars of environmental studies. In a fairly recent issue (2004) of the M.I.T. Press quarterly *Global Environmental Politics*, scholars Emery Roe and Michel Van Eeten have condemned the precautionary principle in matters of environmental policy on the grounds that scientific evidence is not sufficient, calling for empirical knowledge, supposed to be an index to what is and what is not scientific⁸. Is it that globalization has reshaped the image of science in academia, making us wistful once again, and inviting us to find peace of mind in a belated version of science which is reminiscent of the nineteenth century, when science was largely considered to rely on empirical observation, whatever this might mean?

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism ; Cultural Criticism and the Historian’s debate*, Cambridge, Mass., The M.I.T. Press, 1989 [5th printing, 1997], 48.

⁸ Emery Roe and Michel J.G. Van Eeten, « Three – Not Two – Major Environmental Counternarratives to Globalization », *Global Environmental Politics*, 4:4, November 2004; see in particular 36-39.

Empiricism and dogmatic thinking are birds of a feather flocking together. More open intellectual attitudes are necessary to face the risks of globalization upon our environment. Doubt, in particular, may be protective, in this respect. Without it, scientific thinking can be stultified. Science cannot be independent of general interest and social respect, and requires critical detachment to shelter us from the systemic dangers inherent in its objects of inquiry and the applicability of its fundamental findings. In scientific knowledge as well, the culture wars loom large, though they tend to be overlooked. These wars may lead both ways: to cultural changes that will crush social hope, and to cultural changes that will uplift a sense of community and cooperation.

The secularization of value

The values of science, therefore, should be secularized, and scientists should avoid generating systems which hold dangers in them that might express their potential for destruction. The French philosopher and Stanford scholar Jean-Pierre Dupuy has pointed out that the atomic bombing of Japan was the result of systemic danger, in an amazing remark: “Why was the bomb ever used? Because it existed, quite simply”⁹. The implication of what he says is that science too, and what was at one point presented as an advance of the civilized mind, may lead to pragmatic consequences that reshape thinking and emasculate it, if we want to harp on the Derrida proposition that the mystagogues are able to emasculate rationality (let us pardon Derrida’s male chauvinism if we can). Human thinking involves systemic dangers, and one therefore has to rethink thinking in different terms, which has been the task of modern philosophy. Perhaps we might suggest at this point that cultural change involves the thinking of rationality in secularized terms. This means that technology may well lead us astray, tethered as it is to scientific knowledge which we tend to view as total, whereas any inquiry into the results of science tends to demonstrate that science is provisional, and that its propositions will sooner or later be refined, or redefined, and that intellectual inquiry, whatever its field, rarely comes to conclusions that will never be reworded, or revised. Knowledge is an ongoing process, and if we keep this in mind, we secularize science, instead of projecting it onto the higher plane of superior frozen truths. Science, like any other human adventure, unfolds through time, and taking this into consideration helps science respond to social needs.

Political scientists are struggling for secular views, as John Rawls has amply demonstrated. Behind his eulogy of democracy as a condition and an effect of economic and political liberalism, one finds an attempt to define the nature of rationality as the mainspring of social hope. It is striking, when reading John Rawls, to realise the extent to which rationality is assessed in conjunction with its effects upon social organization, which yields workable political conceptions of justice. John Rawls, in his second major opus, *Political Liberalism*, defines political rationality as outcome-centered, and this leads to a list of primary goods, which reads as follows:

- a. basic rights and liberties [...];
- b. freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities;
- c. powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility in the political and economic institutions of the basic structure;
- d. income and wealth; and finally;
- e. the social bases of self-respect.¹⁰

⁹ Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Petite Métaphysique des Tsunamis*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, 85.

¹⁰ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, 181. Joseph Stiglitz follows suits with a set of more technical criteria in *Making Globalization Work*; see the section “Responding to the Democratic Deficit”, 280-285.

Rawls' agenda relies on the traditions of the common-sense philosophy of the English-speaking world and the theoretical culture of pragmatism, which he found ready for use in his New-England intellectual environment. Nowhere do we find perspectives that would be disconnected from and independent of day-to-day preoccupations. Rawls wants to harness human development to democracy, to wring democracy out of economic growth, while there is an increasing belief, in this century, that our globalized economies hold a promise of democracy as an expectation which will always be contradicted by fact. Just recently, in a major contribution to the debate, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that China allies a vicious use of the Asian bludgeon in Tibet with the logics of the European stock-market, and that this betrays the belief that democracy is an obstacle to economic growth. As a result of this, Žižek's assumption is that our global culture might be brought to understand that democracy is no longer needed to back human development, which might lead global cultural change in the wrong direction¹¹. Democracy has to be maintained as a horizon of belief, and as the sole teleology worthy of respect. Rawls helps us understand that teleology should be one version of practicality, though we tend to think that any political teleology is an empty promise. His contribution to political philosophy views rationality not just as a belated version of theology, but as a tool that may help deliver collective results, following in the footsteps of American intellectual traditions which assess value in terms of their pragmatic consequences rather than in terms of otherworldly conceptual exploration.

What if, beyond this sound conception of political values, and the organic laws that go to frame them, human culture was unresponsive, thus precluding cultural change, and sustainable development? It is this situation that Samuel Huntington examines, leaving little room for hope, suggesting that cultures cannot change, or will change slowly or with difficulty, on the grounds that society will not change and that there is no connection between assumptions, beliefs, and the economic and political opportunities that the modern liberal state offers if we are willing to grasp them. Huntington's dream is to get rid of cultural obstacles to economic development, while it is yet unclear whether there is any strong belief in the virtues of democracy in what he has to say. Huntington's answer does not intend to demonstrate that it is democracy which has to be left out of his global picture. In his case, if progress is not fast enough, it is because those cultures which resist progress as seen from Massachusetts are obstacles which one must remove, but Huntington is no clear analyst of how culture and democracy might hinge. "[...] we define culture, Huntington writes, in purely subjective terms as the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society"¹². His vision of culture has left one notion unmentioned: What about solidarity, the cornerstone of Richard Rorty's vision of social hope? It may well be that this is one value that the modern liberal state has eroded, and that solidarity is a basic asset to those communities forming the lesser developed countries of Africa, Latin America and parts of the Asian world, where welfare is weak, and institutionalized education poorly developed, where, for political reasons, states are not ready to reach out to populations and areas left to their own resources and inventiveness in terms of welfare. Huntington's discourse, as a result, is a perfect illustration of the New Conservatism that Habermas has targeted. Modernity, in Huntington's world-view, is seen as totally dependent on itself. Beliefs, in particular, are taken to task, in Huntington's definition of culture. What if beliefs were an adequate instrument of the progress Huntington has in mind, one notion which is empty enough, and which Huntington parades to conceal his conservative views? Inherited ideas and attitudes are more of a survival-kit than an obstacle to social cohesiveness. One hardly knows, when reading Huntington, whether progress, the norm of his perspective, is one

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, « Le Tibet pris dans le rêve de l'autre », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, n° 650, mai 2008, 32.

¹² Samuel Huntington, « Foreword », *Culture Matters : How Values Shape Human Progress*, Lawrence E. Harrison & Samuel Huntington, eds., New York, Basic Books, 2000, XV.

serious academic case of mystagogic thinking, or whether it may have practical applicability². It is arguable that progress, with Samuel Huntington, is an abstract notion.

Asian culture turns out to be an epistemological obstacle to many political scientists. Once considered incapable of generating economic growth, Asian values are seen as an asset in the ongoing economic race, with growth rates that belittles Europe and the United States alike in some quarters of the Asian world. Can one blame economic stagnation on them yesterday, and now say that some basic values of Asian cultures are the leverage of change helping those so-called miracle economies make some headway? There may well be an emphasis on hard work in Chinese culture, but one cannot see how this is specifically Chinese, or American, or British. Lucian Pye, one prominent M.I.T. scholar in Chinese studies, has suggested that Taoism and the belief in good fortune, supposed to be specific to Chinese culture, although I am aware this might be challenged, has produced outgoing dynamic character in the Chinese people, which makes them ready to grasp any opportunity likely to turn to their advantage. Pye's view of Chinese culture may easily been taken to task, as he implies that Chinese culture leaves no room for introspection. This is most probably a typical misconception such as New-England protestant culture wants to bring home. Lucian Pye, in particular, writes the following when considering the reasons for China's rapid expansion: "This stress of the role of fortune makes for an outward-looking and highly reality-oriented approach to life, not an introspective one"¹³. This is, we guess, one academic version of prejudice insisting that the Chinese have no soul, and no interest for an inner life. Economists, on the other hand, go for a more mundane vision of China's development, harping on the capacity to attract foreign investors¹⁴. This is also quite true of many other rising Asian economies besides China.

However, these considerations invite to extend our definition of culture. Culture is not just simply a cluster of beliefs and attitudes outside the realm of economic and political development. Culture is probably much more than beliefs and attitudes. It encompasses what we might call material culture, in the sense that attitudes matter in economic development, which is no big news, if we refer to Max Weber's understanding of the ethic of capitalism, shaped as it is by the sense of insecurity that goes with the necessity to devise for oneself advancement in this world, the better to advance in the next one, or the higher or more sophisticated one in the rich oriental spiritual heritage. No wonder then that Derrida should suggest that between rationality and mystery, there is one connection to be established. And, in Derrida's view of how rationality and mystery interact, one finds an abiding agreement occurring, and this is of course desirable to establish peace in what he calls culture, which to him is more of a socially encompassing substance than a mere individual determinant of behaviour.

Lucian Pye is interesting as an analyst of Chinese social development, not for what certainties he may have in store for us, but for the scepticism which his propositions will cause in most quarters of the academic world, and across disciplines. Examining the reasons for China's economic advance, he writes that "[...] the driving force in Chinese capitalism has always been to find out who needs what and to satisfy that market need"¹⁵. One might meditate for quite a while to determine whether markets are out there for anyone to grab them, or whether one should shape markets, create needs, and respond to one's ambition to grow by being inventive. Nevertheless, Lucian Pye views the Chinese economy as a simplistic answer to world needs, and the capacity to adapt to them, whereas the West is seen as technology-driven, and culturally more sophisticated: "Western firms seek to improve their products,

¹³ Lucian W. Pye, « "Asian Values" : from dynamos to dominoes? », *Culture Matters*, 249.

¹⁴ On this consider Françoise Lemoine, *L'Economie de la Chine*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006, esp. 67-68.

¹⁵ Pye, 250.

strengthen their organizational structures, and work hard to get name recognition”¹⁶. We wonder whether Chinese firms have not always tried to do precisely this, which can only be generalized with a vast highly educated workforce, which China is trying to obtain by adequate investment in higher education. This path is promising, from what we can judge when considering our Chinese students in our institutions of higher learning in Europe.

Cultural change and the University

If therefore, cultures change, not just private cultures, but also public ones, as we increasingly suspect cultures to be, collective assets, university education has a major role to play in this. We, as academics, either experienced or aspiring ones, must address the issue of what a university education ought to be. So far, in this discussion, we have realized that academics should avoid voicing social prejudice, and this has not always been accomplished, to say the least. Jacques Derrida has meditated extensively on this, with a view to promoting the role education might play in defending the values of democracy, no doubt because Derrida’s understanding of the effects of academic training is geared to the idea of a political education for the young. This may be easily understood when one looks at the moral paralysis of the German university and its many graduates embracing Nazism and providing the Nazi regime with its most destructive propagandists and functionaries. However, Habermas is clear on this. German universities cannot be blamed for what befell. Habermas, in particular, points out that the number of students was halved during Nazism in Germany, dropping from 121 000 in 1933 to below 60 000 right before the second world war¹⁷. One reason why this happened, although Derrida is not explicit on this, is that universities tend to overspecialize knowledge, which has caused the decline of humanistic study. Habermas offers similar views, though they are cast in more sociological language. To Derrida, higher education should be critical of whatever rationality wants to assess. He calls this “the university without conditions”, which to him involves an ambitious agenda thus defined: “the primal right to say anything, be it in the name of fiction and of knowledge as experiment, and the right to speak publicly, and to publish this”¹⁸. Habermas offers a more specialized version of what ought to be done, and has been insufficiently accomplished so far: integrating humanistic study and technical expertise to curb the specialization of knowledge¹⁹.

This may sound vague enough, and we wonder where it might lead, because one doubts that knowledge, in our various disciplines, might efficiently refrain from specializing. This is why Derrida comes up with more practical propositions as to the contents and orientations of higher education in the book he published in 2001, *L’Université sans condition*. There are seven such propositions, all having to do with what one might call the architecture of knowledge, all answering the need to redefine humanistic study, which should come alongside more specialized training, either in established scholarly disciplines, or the more mundane training of students towards the professions outside the academic world. The new humanities should, according to Derrida, deal with what he calls “the history of man”, which calls us to devote more attention than has so far been done to human rights, be they masculine or feminine. To him, these rights are “legal performatives”²⁰, which sounds otherworldly owing to the weight of abstraction in the phrase. However, this might basically mean that these rights are to be upheld because they have applicability in the various fields of human activity. And we must bear in mind that these so-called “legal performatives” are performatives because they hold in them an applicability that may be constantly expanded, in

¹⁶ Pye, 250.

¹⁷ Habermas, 104.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *L’Université sans condition*, Paris, Galilée, 2001, 16.

¹⁹ See « The Idea of the University », *The New Conservatism*, 100-127.

²⁰ Derrida, *L’Université sans condition*, 69.

practical terms, to various areas of cultural practice, among them of course, the sciences and business, two areas of higher education that are fast growing to meet the social needs of human development.

The idea of democracy comes second in Derrida's architecture of the new humanities. It comes second for reasons of clarity in his presentation of the programme he has in mind, yet the idea of democracy is not a second-thought, because it runs, let us remember, through all his oeuvre as a philosopher. Let us note that democracy, in what Derrida has to say about it, is not tethered to nationhood. Nationhood is dangerous, and one may easily understand this in the light of European history, and also of Asia. From this, we infer easily that cultural change in the future should not rely on national traditions, and that, in this respect, globalization offers opportunities for positive cross-fertilization. Derrida's meditation on this hinges on the concept of sovereignty. While sovereignty is a desirable goal for each and everyone of us; the idea is viewed as misleading, as it has often been a concept without practical consequence, while we may still hope that sovereignty should remain for individuals as a horizon of belief, and as a value that should guide collective decisions. Yet, if Derrida invites us to abide by this concept, sovereignty, he also believes that any collective formalization of the idea of sovereignty should avoid reliance on the nation-state, which may too easily lead to a betrayal of individual dignity.

Derrida then focuses on the necessity to recuperate the authority of teaching, and of literature, whose proposals cannot be easily understood. One suspects, when reading Derrida's proposals, that teaching, as well as literature, has to do with amity, one concept that emerges from Derrida's body of works. This is not a norm, neither is it prescriptive, neither can it be strictly defined as a doctrine or a set of mandatory rules. We gather this is to be understood as an opening to otherness from the part of the teacher, and a eulogy of respect for the intimacy of the other person, which involves inventiveness and the by-passing of any sort of regulation that defines the other person in some way or other that might lead to a position of authority of a colonial or exploitative nature. It certainly is an attitude of respect, which elbows aside the very notion of authority, "routs it", as Derrida says²¹. The University, therefore, should be an idea that transcends any specialized discourse on the technicalities of education; it consists in letting the other reach out for his or her potential towards self-development. The institutional strength of higher education springs, in Derrida's view of it, from the interaction of the person who teaches and the one being taught to live to the full his or her aspirations. Derrida's ideal is so elevated that it transcends any definition one might come up with. It certainly is a call to confront the normative nature of higher education in order to recuperate a lost sense of human warmth that has been eliminated by the technocratic complexities of institutions seeking intellectual identity in the measurement of student skills and their willingness to comply to them. One also cannot rule out that a backlash has been on the way in higher education itself owing to the rising number of first-generation graduates among the less educated quarters of our national cultures. This has been more of an opportunity for universities to fulfil their cultural mission from the sixties onwards than a serious obstacle to the growth of higher education, and one can argue that Derrida was balking away from the pessimistic discourse one hears in most academic circles today, ill-grounded as it is on the relative accessibility of higher education.

The challenges that higher education has to face, in the context of an ever-increasing cross-fertilization of cultures, points to one underlying question that surfaces from an examination of current economic and social trends. Is what we call culture tethered to social and economic factors? The question is by no means new, and was handed down to us by the industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century, and by Marxist theory. We now tend to

²¹ Derrida, *L'Université sans condition*, 72.

believe that culture is one mode of collective representation that one may disengage from submission to social and economic fact, what the French sociologist Emile Durkheim called the *real structures*, that he saw as disconnected from *institutions or working facts*.²² There is still much thought to be devoted to whether the degree of autonomy of culture as *collective representation* involves radical or relative autonomy from economic factors. We are also hard pressed to determine whether, in this framework of analytical thinking, autonomy is or is not hampered by the necessities of those real structures and the institution that go to shape them, and even, perhaps discreetly justify them. Hence, Stiglitz's view that one must respond to a democratic deficit, and Derrida's view that one must face the serious issue of a democratic deficit in higher education. The question is not benign; and it calls forth an autonomy of the mind to bend social realities and economic factors to purposes that do not derive from them.

²² On this, consider Daniel Parrochia, *La Forme des crises : logique et épistémologie*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2008, esp. 104-128.

Why do cultures change ?

The challenges of globalization

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The lecture shall explore cultural change in the context of the economic globalization under way. It aims at analyzing the role that theoretical inventiveness and ethical value play in fashioning broader cultural representation and responsibility, and shall explore issues of cultural disunity and conflict, while assessing the influence that leading intellectuals may have in promoting a finer perception of value worldwide. The role of higher education as an asset in the defence of democracy and individual self-development shall be discussed with a view to evaluating its potential for an altered course of globalization.