

WHAT LIES IN THE SHADOW OF THE SELF-SERVICE CAR WASH?

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Abstract: Nowadays, we can see a new problem manifesting, and its tendency is increasing. As our title already tries to imply, it is about the very modern automatic self-service car wash stations. In addition, we could also correlate the contemporary washing machine problem – both creating a lot of pollution. It seems that our cities, with their households are creating an enormous pressure on the drainage system. At the end of it, all flows into our rivers or directly into the sea, worsening the pollution there. There, sadly, the problem is out of sight and, consequently, out of mind. But, if we are honest and just a little bit ecologically preoccupied, we see a big problem here, one that could and can be at least diminished if not eliminated. In the end it hinges on the particular individual, the one that goes to the automatic car wash thinking that he or she does something good (at least for his or her car). And we could say the same about the washing machine, for clothes that are not really dirty, using and abusing amounts of washing powder and clean tap water.

The questions we want to raise in this article are: What lies under such an irrational behaviour? How is it that there is no attitude against those tendencies? How comes that people are ignorant of the pollution they cause by using precious resources? And, last but not least, why are we behaving as if a lot of detergent wouldn't harm the sensible balance of our waters, rivers and seas? Is it really necessary to have a clean car if you don't have clean roads? Is it necessary to wash your clothes after you merely wore them for 3 hours in a shopping mall?

Keywords: pollution, cleanliness, tendency, resources, problem

INTRODUCTION

We live in very dynamic times. In spite of this dynamism and perpetual, fast, and very superficial drive to change, we may still recognize some general tendencies which develop and manifest as underflowing currents in our current civilization. To see them we have to adopt an outside perspective, one that is not contained or immersed in the same patterns, or imbued with a similar paradigm. In other words, we should have an outsider look, a rather objective view at what really goes on. As such, we could see,

and comprehend of course, the subtle tendencies beneath the surface of things, happenings, or events which fill the world to the brim.

For instance, there is the problem of the self-service car wash stations spreading like mushrooms even in our villages. To see them from the outside and to have an objective perspective about them, one needs to be a non-participant in the process; in other words, not to care how clean or dirty their car is, on the surface of things.

We do not dispute here the occasional necessity to wash down some damaging accidental or seasonal substances, or the one of keeping the vehicle safety-operational clean but rather the compulsiveness that lies behind.

We already know from the psychoanalyse that the car itself is an unavoidable status symbol, an item that speaks about the owner, their social position and, should we say it?, about their finances or bank account. The same thing is valid concerning the clothes they wear; they too indicate the social status and tell something about what one affords or not in life. And, we should not forget, clothes make the man, as they say, qualifying for what Carl G. Jung called the *persona* which:

“represents a more or less arbitrary and fortuitous segment of the collective psyche that we can make the mistake of regarding it in toto as something individual. It is, as its name implies, only a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks.” (Jung 2007:181).

In fact, these attributes (cars, clothes, etc.) do not make people, they just (re)present an image and are an important part of the social mask we all were taught, since early childhood, to wear once we leave our house and personal space. It is, in the end, about exaggerations upon exaggerations, built one on top of the other in order for no one to see or to discern the real thing that lies buried deep at the origin. It is not so much the tendency that counts (which itself can be well overrated and an exaggeration in itself), but rather the conditioning and compulsiveness to which it invites us to repeat, over and over again. Of course, it is basically and undeniably a purely commercial issue imbedded in publicity, advertisement, politics, and lobbying, and, last but not least, covered by the ubiquitous mask of the famous social-pressure.

To wash your car, you have to pay – machines work better when they guzzle coins, or read credit cards, or mobile phones, to feed on your money (or the money the banks lend so generously). As such, we should agree that we live in an ominous mercantile society, one in which money reigns

supreme. But the really revolting issue about the self-service car wash systems put in place (every place as it seems), is that one goes there to pay for the privilege of washing his own car! It is not enough that you pay – for your car to be washed – no! You must pay to do the work also!

How have they persuaded us to be so naïve? How, for instance, did they convince us to go to the supermarket and not only search for each item we need at home, but to play the cashier or to do the cashiers work as well? How far can the human conditioning go? Because nowadays we see people conscientiously doing their payment at the automatic cash register. It is, if we have a better look at how society actually works, like Dan Lyons said: “Technology should be a tool in the service of mankind, but sometimes it seems that humans are made subordinate to technology.” (Lyons 2019:131). Isn’t it amazing how humans were persuaded to accept and to integrate this surreptitious invasion of a technological enslavement? Aren’t we hostages in a system that surrounds us from every direction we look and consequently, we see less and less escape possibilities?

It is also amazing what a sophisticated psychology is actually involved in order to succeed in making us do all the work and, on top of it, to be happy about our own enslavement! And why is it that everyone is happy to do the work that, after all, is stolen, or at least taken away, from the ex-employees who used to do it traditionally (and, what about they? Where do they go? On government funds or towards homelessness or delinquency)? Because one was told that it is faster and easier like that and, after all, it is rather cheap. Because one really believed that it is about one’s own time, that is so precious. Do we actually believe that someone or somebody is really concerned about our time, or about us having or lacking time? Don’t we all know that there is no more time left over for us to have and to enjoy, that we live in a hurry all the time because we don’t have time?

In the end it is a miracle, but, if we look closer, it is a miracle of human psychology and once it is implemented somewhere, it will spread as a virus. Although everyone thinks and imagines that they are free, because we live in liberal societies, we are not very far away from the tendencies of a wide spread and deeply ingrained social-psychology.

The car wash industry and its sister, the washing machine

Without any doubt we live in an industrial age – everything around us is, or if it is not yet it should be in the near future, industrial. Although, as they say, our society has its main focus on services, those too are nowadays more or less industrialised. As it is also with the self – car wash stations. On

the internet we can find entire business profiles of how to build up a car wash firm or company and how to calculate or evaluate the profits one can make by such an enterprise. Actually, it is a business model which is on the rise because it offers something “vital” to the modern corporate person. From a strictly capitalist perspective it is just a business model, one that exploits, with maximum efficiency, a deep need for compensation and an even deeper psychological void of the modern human. But from a psychological point of view, there is a lot to analyse and even more to infer, to suspect, or to denounce. And the same goes for the ecological aspects of this industrialised service offer which is on the rise despite the fact that they don’t manage very well the waste and pollution problem left behind.

Why is it that people don’t seem to be too preoccupied by those ominous aspects of modern capitalist exploitation? Are we really in a tumbling washing machine civilization that has numbed our reason and ability to analyse what is really going on? Are we so naïve that we cannot see that although we do all the work (benevolently), we still must pay for it? Or, if we have to pay, because, as we all know, there is no such a thing as a free meal, why aren’t the end prices going down? We should see, after all, that they manage the new platform businesses with minimum (if any) employees, which of course, means: no salaries, no insurances, no sick-leaves, no pensions, no night hours or holidays, but more and more income for the owner. So, overall, the question is how and why? And maybe we get closer if we look into what Michael Folley has to say about how it really works:

“Conditioning is not a simple one-way transfer but a complex circular process fed by constant feedback loops. What often happens is that changing social attitudes cause a few people to develop a new need or a more urgent version of an old need and an astute entrepreneur notices the development and provides an appropriate product or service.” (Folley 2011:31).

We see here, it in a nutshell: this is how it works for every new platform firm. In the meantime, we have not only “platform companies or firms” but also, we are speaking, at least on the internet, about “multi-platforms” or “multi-sided platforms” in a “revolutionary platform business” and so on ... As they say, it is all about business, but the business of profit is just for them – those who come up with the “revolutionary” stuff and the new business models – and, for the clients remains just the business of work. They not only have to pay, in general the same price if not even a higher one, and be happy about it, but also to do the work (and be happy

about that too). If more and more of them are involved in the process, the “revolutionary platform business” can congratulate themselves because:

“This legitimizes, reinforces and spreads the new attitude, so more people express the need more openly and more entrepreneurs service it. Soon the phenomenon has become a new norm; everyone is doing it. Eventually it becomes the natural law and influences even those who do not have the need and wish never to have it.” (Folley 2011:31).

As it becomes clearer from Folley’s observations, the platform phenomenon is in fact based on a number of psychological manipulation and builds upon some very subtle manoeuvres of social engineering. As soon as those two are put together by “astute entrepreneurs”, the masses will follow and submit to the new offers, especially if they are multi-sided platforms as every revolutionary platform business has to be in order to sell its products or provide its services. And, every time we are speaking of psychology and its subtle manipulations, we should not forget to consider the very important issue of compensation and the perniciousness of over-compensation. The contemporary citizen usually lives in a city or a town (or at least in a suburbia) and, consequently, has very little physical activity to do (besides, maybe, walking their dog). Most of their movements are done by cars and seldom by other means of transportation (metro, bus, tram, or bike). If one is at home – the famous “couch-potato” – or at the desk in front of the computer, seated on a chair in a cubicle, there is not very much movement or real physical activity for the human body to do. But the human body is, at least phylogenetically, built for movement, exercise, and physical activity. So, what our civilization misses is to address the most basic need of our bodies: movement, exercise, physical involvement, etc. This lack of physical activity, in turn, creates a need to compensate or to be compensated somehow by something, in the extreme by any kind of activity, no matter which one.

And that is the perfect opportunity for the platform business of the self-car wash industry. Everyone can compensate the lack of physicality inherent to the passive life in the city or the modern suburbia. Somewhere or somehow, there is a constant and consequent fight against our very own human nature. First of all, we as humans were not built to live in an artificial environment as the one offered by our modern city life. Secondly, we are not fitted to live in closed spaces, but in the open to have contact with the fresh air, the sun, and the wind. Thirdly, we should move all day long in search for our food, to build shelters or to watch our territory. And the enumeration may go on and on, but we don’t aim here to have an exhaustive

anthropological summary. The lack to fulfil all those primary needs of our very own ancestral nature will leave some traces, not only in our physical body but, in our psychological well-being also. Consequently, we will have to compensate somehow, meaning to do something about it and to alleviate the burden of estrangement from an anthropological and ethical point of view.

How does it work?

In 1929 Edward Bernays encouraged women to smoke by telling them, and here comes the right choice of words: that smoking is not just smoking, pure and simple (as it is for men for instance), but instead, if they were to light up a cigarette, they would light up some celebrated “torches of freedom”. As such, smoking (considered until then as being too vulgar and degrading for women) became a new step further in the fight for freedom, equal rights, and feminine emancipation. It was a brilliant marketing campaign, the effects of which last even today – we still have women that smoke (because of E. Bernays who has liberated them from old age taboos, and enriched beyond any expectation the tabaco industry). But nowadays, we also have other items waiting for presentation, advertising, packaging, and delivering to the public. The only question is how to transform something banal, or insignificant, or irrelevant, or contingent into something relevant, important, necessary, or even status projecting? In other words: how to change appearances by transforming them into something meaningful an, how to convince the public to need them, to desire them, and consequently to willingly buy such “freshly baked” products once they come out from the advertising industry oven?

The car wash industry is just one among other very diverse offers – the “washing machine” is just another. Both “products” and necessities have some very significant similarities because one pays with one’s own time and money (of course) to participate to the new trend. Besides the personal involvement, there is also, and this is just another similarity between the two, a more implicit involvement, one that is social, ethical, and unfortunately ecological: both activities need and consume water (often, cleaned and filtered tap-water) and an ever-increasing offer of detergents in order to work and to pollute ... Paradoxically we could say that in order for us to clean our cars or our clothes we have to dirty our rivers, ground water, and the sea where it all ends up.

But there is also another very strong motivation behind those two industrial offers of our modern life. After being conditioned to love, and

consequently, to want and to need or, even better, to get compulsive about cleanliness (often from care for the dear ones), one, as a modern urbanised corporate citizen, also has to compensate the deep psychological need for activity, in other words, to be involved in something that is extra work, an “extracurricular” free time activity. Again, we do not dispute the necessary washing here, but the compulsion of it, the tendency to repeat the shampoo cycle, the cleaning cycle, or to use more and more detergent, higher temperatures, or longer and longer time for each program. The obsessive car wash and the washing machine compulsion tend to become a kind of spare-time activity, a hobby focused on cleanliness which is not very far from the modern fear of dirtiness, germs, and infections of all kind.

Usually, a hobby was something one did for pleasure, or as a past-time, and maybe, but not forcefully, for some very personal growth or self-development. Nowadays, it seems that the growth aspect is just about the revenue of some very astute entrepreneurs who are selling “products” with enhanced and way to overrated value, importance, or significance. On the other hand, we have of course the public at large who is willing to agree and to sign in for the waste of time, money, and energy – clients who seem to be very happy to work some more and, what is even harder to understand, to pay for it with their own money (or credit).

After almost one hundred years, the observations of E. Bernays are still valid and active everywhere we look– probably because their efficiency and atemporal pertinence. Everything of social significance, after Bernays, has to be done with the help and implication of propaganda (Bernays 1928). The more astute the propaganda (or “public relations”, as Bernays himself renamed it in order to distance it from the infamous “Ministry of Propaganda” of Nazi Germany), the better the results. The cleverer the “packaging” and the “presentation”, namely the face-value of a product, the nicer and bigger the sales and the profits will be.

Another big hit of Edward Bernays was with “adding an egg” to the Betty Croker cake mix. Because the cake was too easy to make, women felt guilty for not contributing more, from their position as dedicated and perfect housewives (that they were supposed to be at the time). But, once one contributed to the process by adding an egg to the mix, (we should not miss the psychoanalytic implication here: an “egg” meaning “the egg”, namely the ovule a fertile woman “contributes” to the “mix”), the guilt vanishes. In other words, again from a psychoanalytic perspective, the cake made by the housewife for her husband is nothing more than offering herself, symbolically, of course, to her husband; only then the whole thing becomes rewarding and everyone is pleased, even the contorted psychoanalytical

insights into the workings of the human psyche possessed by the compulsions of the unconscious dictums.

And the same goes for the self-car washing process. After feeling guilty for spending too much time on the couch, by washing the car one feels worthier (or they are led to feel that way) because they contribute and do something tangible (something facilitated and made possible by a platform firm apparently preoccupied by our cars and how clean they are). Of course, you must pay for your involvement. On a more subtle and psychological level, the payment is not so much for the service provided by the platform firm (that's only the formal, legal, and financial part), but rather for the good feeling one gets after contributing and being involved into a process everyone else does unconditionally. So, one pays with money, time, and work, to diminish their feelings of guilt generated by the "couch potato life" that the same capitalist system has created and promoted. One must pay to wash away emotional and psychological dirt that accumulates as consequence of a stressful and unfulfilling life, a life that is always on the run towards something new – hopefully fulfilling the deep need for real and genuine spiritual satisfaction –, or from the permanent dissatisfaction, frustration and unfulfillment every day brings upon. After all, one does not want so much from life, but to feel better than yesterday and feel at ease today, to have (one deserves as much, doesn't one?) at least some good feeling about oneself. We should realise, however, that such a good feeling about oneself refers rather to the *persona* aspects of the urbanised citizen, and not to the deeper levels of our psyche.

And there is more to it! The modern car wash industry, as well as the washing machine abuse, are in line with the "homo ludens", Johan Huizinga spoke about (Huizinga 2002). It is all about play and have fun, with some kind of activity involved, because the big problem today is to have at least some kind of meaning, any kind of meaning, even if it is not very meaningful, after all (we are at least as clever and smart as to intellectualise everything we do, feel, think or believe and to imbue with importance even the most insignificant or irrelevant things). As Rutger Bregman in his *Human Kind, A Hopeful History*, noticed: "Our biggest shortfall isn't in a bank account or budget sheet, but inside ourselves. It's a shortage of what makes life meaningful. A shortage of play." (Bregman 2020:297). People need to play, to enjoy themselves by something they do willingly and without obligation, and self-car washing or the washing machine activities are one of the best playgrounds for the new, emancipated corporate type. Such a person does not conceive to tend for a fruit tree or to work a garden,

for instance, to cultivate carrots or tomatoes, because plants grow in dirt and dirt is actually and unavoidably dirty...., especially in our clean and more or less sterilised cities. What is more, the supermarket life and its implicit perspective, provides us with fruits, carrots, or tomatoes, or indeed anything else, so cheap that any initiative or tendency towards self-sustainability seems to be absurd or at least ridiculous. Consequently, tending a garden, or a courtyard, or whatever patch of land left after erecting the modern mansion one must have to be in line with the Joneses, will not qualify for any extra-curricular activity, except maybe the grill or the pool for some noisy gathering. As such, the self-car washing and the washing machine are firmly placed on the cleaner side of life. Playing with them is not dirty; on the contrary, it is all about washing dirt away, a very civilised activity, one that gets rid of not only the dirt but the germs also, and everything else that could contaminate our sterilised city environment.

A tradition now lost tells us that in other, more traditional times, people cherished the earth, the peasants wanted an allotment, the bigger the better, to work it for their sustenance. But, thanks to the reverse migration, nowadays, city people buy out the rural people, out of their courtyards and gardens, to build there at least two stories houses, sometimes two or more of them on the same lot. Productive and fertile soil is now nothing more than “a lot” where one can erect a big, way too big, family house. As the development sharks well know it, you can make a lot of money by dividing the lots you bought from naïve villagers into smaller parcels to be sold afterwards. Consequently, gardens and the idea of having a plot to work on it, tend to expire, as a nonsense of tradition and history. As such, after leaving the city for being too crowded, the new urbanised citizens of the contemporary city or the very modern suburbia, find themselves in a very bizarre situation: again, there is no more play- or work-ground around them. But still, and in spite of that generalised tendency, his or her body wants to have some kind of activity, the human body has to have something to do. One can't just sit all day long (or evening long, or weekend long, for that matter) watching TV or browsing the net. After all, life is, or at least it should be, more than losing oneself in front of a screen and in everything that pops on and off it, every moment of one's life.

Self-car wash (or the washing machine) is, taking that modern background into account, the perfect alternative to involve people in activity. It doesn't matter that those activities are artificially created, as well as it doesn't matter very much that people are exploited by a bunch of greedy entrepreneurial capitalists who have created these spare time occupations. How is that so, we may ask ourselves? How is it that so many

people conform to a certain behavioural pattern, one that is socially certified and politically approved? Or rather, should we ask ourselves where are we as humans situated on an anthropological scale, one that tells us where we stand in relation to ourselves and the most noble mission on earth, namely to be human. Because, as Neil Oliver observed:

“Too often today we find ourselves herded into groups, our behaviour governed by group-thinking. Now as never before we should remember we are individuals first and always – unique, each of us a singularity.” (Oliver 2020:167).

In other words, we should realise that modern humans are dissolved into the inexorable maelstrom of social psychology, or psychology of the masses, as the great social observer Gustave Le Bon outlined it (Le Bon 1983). And the self-car wash is one of the best illustration one can find to exemplify that concerning social reality. It is a phenomenon on the rise, one that started with men, who could invoke a car preoccupation, but that rapidly permeated and extended towards the feminine part of the population. In the meantime, it is perfectly normal to see men and women alike, side by side, washing passionately their cars, doing the cleaning and everything else this attribute of the *persona* needs in order to represent them in the world without realising that: “Each of us has the power and, more than that, the absolute responsibility to act for the greater good.” (Oliver *ibid.*). Of course, we could ask here, what good does a washed car do to our already very stressed environment? Can we justify all the pollution and waste of resources by saying that they serve a greater good, namely to preserve an image and to underline a status, to justify one’s *persona*? Or, are we able to become more responsible and at least try to see the greater picture, in which we and our self-importance are not so important after all? Because:

“With every thought and move we can make the universe itself slightly worse or slightly better. Any failure to do the latter is down to each individual. The buck stops with each one of us.” (Oliver *ibid.*).

So, it is, or should be, a matter of personal responsibility, that is at least self-evident. The problem with this self-responsibility is that there is no one to assume it. Why would that be so? Because there is no responsible individual, no more personal point of view capable to see the greater picture humanity is facing. Once dissolved into the mass psychology and all its compulsory “you must do this and that” – wash your car, for instance or compulsively wash your clothes – there are no more responsible and mature

subjects but merely points in a cloud that goes wherever it is pushed by the statistical winds of profit and sells (as I have extensively analysed in *Adultus Rex*, 2021; *Evacuarea sublimului*, 2023; *Omul obișnuit, geniul și magister ludi*; 2023).

In fact, what seems to count is that the contemporary individual needs those kinds of occupation of his or her time in order to justify a physical tendency and request our body has on us. Both activities have an added extra to them: they are clean, it is about washing, and, as such, fit for the modern sophisticated citizen. Although the vast majority of the new city dwellers come from more humble origins (most of them have parents still leaving in villages), the new occupations have something to say about the great distance they have put behind them. Now they do the washing in a modern contemporary environment and are doing it rather as a hobby than a productive labour. Even more so, they have the feeling that it is their free choice to engage in those activities. It seems that no one realises that they conform to a more generalised pattern, an offer legitimised only by intense advertising campaigns, a new product designed to profit and exploit one of the most problematic hazards of contemporary life: its meaninglessness and boredom.

But, on the other hand, one may ask why should we speak of boredom regarding the washing of one's own car? One can argue that it isn't boredom involved but rather concern for how that car looks, that you cannot leave it dirty and stained with all that dirt on our roads. But, exactly by taking our roads into account – roads which are indeed dirty beyond measure, because they are never cleaned – to compulsively wash one's own car is not only a waste of time but it is really and unequivocally absurd or at least it doesn't make any sense, especially because, after a day, the dirt is back on. But "the God-Car", second in value after "the House", should be preserved and be cared for. One must show that one cares about their possessions. They are important as status symbols. If one doesn't care about status then one's own image and self-esteem become neglected and such an attitude is unacceptable. It could be a problem not only of one's status but also of one's acceptance in the peer group of friends or colleagues. Those are very important things nowadays and, as Rollo May showed, the greatest fear of the contemporary citizen is to be ostracised by the group:

"The real threat is not that of not being accepted, but to be excluded from the group, to be left alone, solitary. In this exaggerated social engagement, the consistency of the individual is very thin because the individual has to be all the time like others." (May 2013:25).

Still, and in spite of that, there is the same belief in a free will, one that was imported from America and placed over a population of freshly baked democrats, as we find plenty of them in the Est of the continent, in the former soviet bloc. In Europe and especially in the eastern part of it, we emulate a model that was instilled over the ocean, one that firmly believes in a democratic meritocracy where everyone can achieve whatever one wants or wishes, as Robert Sapolsky remarks:

“After all, most Americans have been educated to believe in free will and have reflected on how this produces responsibility for our actions. And most have also been taught to believe in a moralising god, guaranteeing that your actions have consequences.” (Sapolsky 2023:390).

But unfortunately, Americans or Europeans are not capable of taking responsibility for their actions and more so for the ecological consequences of their behaviour patterns, and even less so Est-Europeans who have so much to compensate for. And if they take responsibility, it is only and, in most cases, exclusively on a restricted personal level. Usually, they don't see beyond their immediate objectives and compulsions. If they are socially predetermined to wash their car or to abuse the washing machine, they will do it thinking that it is for their own good, or pleasure, or need (or incontrovertible compulsion). But, from their concrete way of thinking, namely from their narrow subjective perspective, they won't realise what it means for our waters and our ground to flood them with so much detergent and to consume our precious water (often physically, chemically, and biologically cleaned), to wash away the car's dirt although the roads of an entire country are chronically dirty. When it rains all streets are covered with mud and when it is nice and sunny, they are covered with the omnipresent dust. Why wash your car? What for? Or, rather, what is it in for you to, regularly and repeatedly, do such a senseless work? Could we conclude that there is no free will and that, in spite of the absurdity of the attitude and the behaviour, there is a greater power of manipulation and “social-engineering” more powerful than any individual? Does nowadays the individual count for nothing more than to be just a “unit” who has to be put into a pattern? And is it so unproblematic to see that those units conform, are reliable, and predictable although everyone is convinced that he or she does exactly what they want? Is it possible, in other words, that one cannot see the discrepancy between behaviour and speech or thought? And how is it possible that no one seems to realise that the car-wash industry is just one of the many pollutants we so unconsciously sustain? After all, how is it possible to look at your car only (or your clothes, for that matter) and admire

its cleanliness and not think, or see, or understand, in the same time, that you are polluting the environment not only with the dirt you wash away (where does it go?) but also with the wasted water and the detergent that goes to the sewage system and from there into our rivers or to contaminate our ground-water? Sadly, it seems that to handle such a contradiction one needs to be specially trained to develop a semi-conscious operating mode, one that works at both hands, so to speak. On the one side it is a conscious processing: you clean your car, you pay for it, you want to preserve your status and social image and, on the other side, you don't even have a question or bother where all that detergent and dirt washed away from your car goes or how it is handled once it disappears from your view. It is like all that and so much more of the items of our modern world are addressed for splitting-the-brain processes, for individual that cannot connect two points together, not to mention to see the general picture of our suffering and contaminated contemporary world. And it is not only about the split between our primitive and our modern brain, or our emotional and intellectual one, but between our ego and our persona, or again in Murray Bowen's terms, between our solid self and the pseudo-self, fabricated to deal with life, especially the social aspects of it. (Bowen 2004 or Kerr 2019).

Then, there is another aspect to be observed in our contemporary citizens. Following vaguely a *carpe diem* idea, they are living more or less in the present. Of course, it is not a punctual present but rather a *peri-present*. But where can the present be extended? It is no wonder for the modern human to have around this present, in which he or she is thrown, a past and a future, because the present is, from our dynamic point of view, just a flickering moment between the past and the future. So, most tend to live in a very near future, we may say the immediate future, where their wishes should come true. As for instance when one goes to wash his car, he does it because in the immediate or near future he will go to a wedding or to visit somebody he knows well and he couldn't present himself with a dirty or an unwashed car – that would damage his self-esteem and be bad for his persona.

In symmetry with the domain of the near or immediate future there is the near past. Somebody will remember the day before, what they have eaten or what a great drink they had with friends and so on. But they will not have access to a real past, namely a long-term past (a history) because they are disconnected from it. Actually, such an individual has no connection with his own past, he has no temporal perspective because in the past all is blurred and very confusing. It is too far away and, more than that, it is really irrelevant for the life lived in the promise of the near future. The connection

with the past and history is severed from childhood through education – not enough learning in school, and no interest for others, and what we could learn from them or from their mistakes – as well as a total disconnecting so typical for youngsters who think that everyone above the age of 30 are, more or less, elderly and pretty near to the grave. Symmetrically, he will not have very much insight into the distant future; for instance, he won't worry by having a loan that extends for the next 30 years, a loan he took for his fancy and over dimensioned house (a house he doesn't own and where he does not often stay because he needs to drive, in the car he doesn't own, to the job that pays for the former two).

So, no past mirrors no future. Nothing to give a larger perspective on life. In other words, one lives in the tiny oscillations possible in between the near past and the near future, from yesterday's past pleasures and satisfactions to the promised ones of tomorrow. In fact, it is the only life one can live if conditioned or trained as a circus pet, to present itself and attract maximum attention. Of course, we recognize here the new breed of corporate young-wolves that we see in all those self-car wash firms. Everything is on the move in such a life. There is no history, no wise grandfathers from whose life experience to learn, there is nothing more but the moment, namely the very next moment when you take your freshly shampooed car to a drive through the city. That is something you can be proud of! When seated in your car, especially if it is an A..., a B.. or a M....., you can be proud to have achieved something worth presenting to the world. And that is important. And that is your present life. What more could there be?

No past or history means no perspective, as such everything is short-lived. Jobs are becoming more and more mobile, phones must be changed every year, cars follow suit, relations, especially of young corporates, are also on the fast track, of one-night stands consumed with shortened intensity and no attachment involved. Such an individual lives his or her atomized live on the only level they know: the narcissistic one. Concentrated only on themselves, constantly searching for easy pleasures or instant gratifications, they are like those cosmic singularities that astrophysicists speak of, where there is no time at all because the notion of time is not significant any more. Such a life can be resumed as: "carpe diem".

Such individuals are so very far from being like those massive trees that have, as it is well known, the same extent of root as they have branches in the crown. Such a natural living thing has a certain symmetry, what is above corresponds to what lies beneath, what is beneath firms what is above, and what is above feeds what lies beneath. There is, in nature, an

innermost equilibrium that balances out every extreme or unusual appearance that will be, naturally, compensated. The basis for that is the natural equilibrium developed in very long periods of history and the past. Nowadays we have lost those natural tendencies or perspective because we were required to have

“a new relationship with the land, with soils, and with the minerals beneath the surface of the earth; one built on the principles of possession, extraction, commodification and ever-increasing productivity” (Hickel 2022:67).

But in order to possess and exploit something you must first regard it as an object.” (Hickel *ibid.*). For our city dwellers nature and land, the earth and the soil are very far away. They rather are things to avoid than basics of life one should treasure and appreciate. Land and nature are something you just drive through, in your freshly waxed car, as fast as you can, to arrive at the next urgent appointment. Meanwhile, soil is nothing more than dirt that gets on your car and which you must wash it away. Such natural things are a nuisance for the modern city or suburbia dweller. As specified in my previous book on ethics (Gozo 2017) we deal with adults that are chronically immature and, as such, they have childish perspectives on life and human destiny.

Conclusions

Our post-industrial society invites us to observe only the pleasure principle and to neglect the reality principle, conditioning us to search for the shortest way to satisfaction and thus not to consider the implications our actions pose, on a long run, on our environment. As such, we live in the peri-present, having no roots and no crown, reduced to a log from which anybody can sculpt anything, even a consumerist totem.

It is a known fact that big boys want big toys and it is obvious that bigger boys will want bigger toys.

But what if the biggest boys want the biggest toys – and this is, nowadays, perfectly understandable? It remains only a problem for the car manufacturers, but we think that no matter how big, bigger or the biggest the whims of contemporary urbanites are, the industry will oblige. It will, we can be sure of it, make every effort to provide, year after year, for bigger and bigger toys for those bigger and bigger boys of our new millennium.

And nobody seems to realise that there is a problem with that continuous crescendo of big, bigger and the biggest cars, houses, yachts or whatever that has to match the corresponding arrogance and vanity of our boys...

And exactly that is what lies in the shadows and in the shadow of the self-service car wash also: a recurrent unfulfillment of the *ego* determines an ever-increasing investment in the *persona*, that speculated by the rapacity of post-industrial players and aided by “propaganda” transforms the boys, no matter how big they are, in toys.

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