



THE MYTH OF THE WICKED CITY IN THE CULTURAL CRITICISM OF O. SPENGLER

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O. Spengler was one of the leading protagonists of cultural criticism in the 20th century. His oeuvre had been rooted in the German intellectual climate of the pre-war period and war years. The German tradition based on an ambivalent relation to modernity, after the German defeat suffered at the end of the First World War, emerged as the movement of “conservative revolution”. This new kind of conservatism, on the one hand, enthusiastically greeted technological advancement, while, on the other hand, rejected social and political modernization. The opposition of the city and the country-side was a central theme of this way of thought. Spengler in his “morphology of world history” gave an outstanding place to this opposition. Our paper offers a reconstruction, in this respect, of the theory of Spengler.

Keywords: caesarism, civilization, conservative revolution, culture, decline, democracy, morphology of world history, progress.

Introduction

It is impossible to find an author in the philosophy of the 20th century who criticized in a harder manner the megalopolis and its way of life than Oswald Spengler. His challenging, astounding and sometimes alarming metaphors are almost always interconnected with the critique of urban civilization. In his *magnum opus* entitled *The Decline of the West* metropolis appears in many forms. Sometimes it is a devastating demon¹; sometimes a fester embedded in the ancient provincial culture (Spengler 1932 II: 193), sometimes a parasite which sucks the vital life energies of the fertile country-side degrading a colony of the metropolis. The peasant is gaping on the streets of the city, being exposed to the mockery of urban mob and does not understand anything from this alien incomprehensible world. His only role, in this constellation, dominated by the urban way of life, is to feed this gigantic stomach, the parasite of the organic manner of life (Spengler 1932 II: 95). Reading these caustically scornful lines, it is *Metropolis*, the famous contemporaneous film (released in 1926) directed by Fritz Lang comes to our mind:

“At the beginning, where the Civilization is developing to full bloom (today), there stands the miracle of the Cosmopolis, the great petrification, a symbol of the form-

¹ “The world-city, the land-devouring demon, has set its rootless and futureless men in motion <...>” (Spengler 1932 II: 427, footnote 5).

less — vast, splendid, spreading in insolence. It draws within itself the being-streams of the now impotent countryside, human masses that are wafted as dunes from one to another or flow like loose sand into the chinks of the stone. Here money and intellect celebrate their greatest and their last triumphs. It is the most artificial, the cleverest phenomenon manifested in the light-world of human eyes — uncanny, “too good to be true”, standing already almost beyond the possibilities of cosmic formation (Spengler 1932 II: 431).

Spengler and the German intellectual tradition

Spengler’s aversion to the city was rooted in a strong tradition of German intellectual life. This tradition had been established by Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl and it was continued by Ferdinand Tönnies and Georg Simmel. The most suitable definition of it, that it was the conservative critique of metropolitan civilization whose intellectual core is a marked opposition of city and village.

The contrast of city and village, more precisely of metropolis and village comes from the opposition of two historical epochs in the historical philosophy of Spengler: *culture* and *civilization*. This opposition is not his innovation; it had been rooted in the overheated hysterical German atmosphere of the First World War. Anton Mirko Koktanek, the author of one of the most seminal Spengler biographies, calls our attention to the fact that these notions were fitted into different contexts in the countries of the belligerent countries. In the phraseology of English and French side the *entente* was the protector of civilization against barbarism; the Germans, in contrast to it, were deeply convinced to be the defenders of organic culture against the artificial lifeless and mechanic civilization (Koktanek 1968: 176). The war, in the interpretation of Werner Sombart, was waged between the English, as the nation of merchants and the Germans, as the nation of heroes. *Die Ideen von 1914*, according to Friedrich Meinecke and Erich Troeltsch, represented the correction of Western liberalism and individualism. The abstract Western idea of liberty, in their opinion, was opposed by an organic idea of liberty during the War. Rudolf Kjellén, in his book entitled *Die Ideen von 1914, Weltgeschichtliche Perspektiven* (first edition in 1915) summarized the main ideas of 1914; the Western powers, according to him, championed *liberty, fraternity* and *equality*, while Germany was consigned to *duty, honesty* and *order*.

Detailed mapping of the intellectual-cultural space which gave the context of *The Decline of the West* is beyond the scope of our investigation (about this problem see Mohler 1989; Rauschnig 1941). What is only possible here is to indicate some important milestones. Spengler has usually been classified as a one-book author whose *magnum opus* contains all his theory. This interpretation, in the light of the latest investigations, has been modified; John Farrenkopf has proved that the Spenglerian oeuvre underwent important changes during his authors’s intellectual carrier (Farrenkopf 2001). At the same time undeniable that *The Decline of the West* is most important wellspring of his ideas which has been exerted on great importance to posterity. The book evoked a great array of sharp critiques (Schroeter 1922) but became a bestseller which deeply impressed the contemporaneous German public opinion. The work had been conceived in the strange intellectual climate of pre-war and war years of the Wilhelmian Germany.

The morphology of world history and the critique of city

Spengler's critique of city has been imbedded in his theory of culture; it cannot be separated from his morphology of world history. His aversion to urban civilization is not a monolith phenomenon; he makes a clear distinction between the city of culture and the metropolis of civilization. Culture and civilization are the ensuing phases of the same historic entity:

“For every Culture has its own Civilization. In this work, for the first time the two words, hitherto used to express an indefinite, more or less ethical distinction, are used in a periodic sense, to express a strict and necessary organic succession. The Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture, and in this principle we obtain the viewpoint from which the deepest and gravest problems of historical morphology become capable of solution. Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again” (Spengler 1932 I: 31).

In the historical morphology of Spengler the beginning of a culture is connected to the emergence of the city. “World history is city history” (Spengler 1932 II: 95), – declares the German philosopher. But this world history is not a universal history of mankind as it was conceived by the Enlightenment. Spengler determinedly refuses the idea of a linear, cumulative historical progress. Every culture as a unique historical entity has been rooted in a specific soil. Treating the history of cultures Spengler uses a biological metaphor. Culture, which otherwise appears as a peculiar *morph*, as the subject of the morphology of world history, in his theory is a plant which comes out of the seed, grows, blossoms, withers and last dies. Different cultures as different plants come through the same phases of life – this conception entitles Spengler to use *analogy* as the main means of historical investigation². Every culture has its own soul but that soul comes to nothing when the small, human-scale country town becomes gigantic inhuman metropolis:

“In the earliest time the landscape-figure alone dominates man's eyes. It gives form to his soul and vibrates in tune therewith. Feelings and woodland rustlings beat together; the meadows and the copses adapt themselves to its shape, to its course, even to its dress. The village, with its quiet hillocky roofs, its evening smoke, its wells, its hedges, and its beasts, lies completely fused and embedded in the landscape. The country town confirms the country, is an intensification of the picture of the country.

² The opposition of the spheres of causality and destiny bears a basic importance in the philosophy of Spengler. The cause – effect scheme, according to him, can be usable only in natural sciences which are engaged with inanimate nature. In the terrain of history, which is engaged with the biography of animate organic cultures the proper method is using of analogies and here the idea of cause must be replaced by the notion of destiny. This Spenglerian conception has naturally provoked many critiques. Some interpreters explain that Spengler simply alleviates himself from the burden of strict conceptual analysis and rational argumentation (Lübbe 1980: 17). Farrenkopf, the author of a new Spengler-biography, is more lenient, in this respect, to Spengler (Farrenkopf 2001: 20–22).

It is the Late city that first defies the land, contradicts Nature in the lines of its silhouette, denies all Nature. It wants to be something different from and higher than Nature. These high-pitched gables, these Baroque cupolas, spires, and pinnacles, neither are, nor desire to be, related with anything in Nature. And then begins the gigantic megalopolis, the city-as-world, which suffers nothing beside itself and sets about annihilating the country picture. The town that once upon a time humbly accommodated itself to that picture now insists that it shall be the same as itself” (Spengler 1932 II: 94).

Urban development has three distinct life-phases; it begins with country town, continues with culture city and terminates with metropolis. The latter in Spengler’s theory appears as the Great Harlot which is not able to produce anything good. The fact that world history is city history involves that the peasant lives outside history – he is an extra-historical being. He is the perennial man who is incapable to create high culture, consequently he is unable to generate history. Historical action, in the Spenglerian theory, is the privilege of ancient estates; that of priests and nobles. But the existence of these estates generates a dichotomy between the acting men who create history and the men of eternal truths who only meditate upon history³. The distinction between facts and eternal truths is one of the basic features of the Spenglerian historical philosophy. This distinction is connected to the problem of relation of politics and morality. Spengler goes further than Niccolò Machiavelli because in his theory the spheres of morality and politics are not only separated but they are opposed to each other. Eternal moral truths in the empire of politics are converted into ideologies, inevitably get instrumentalized and used as means by the men of action who create history.

The estates of priests and nobles present only the necessary but not the satisfactory pre-condition of the beginning of history; it needs the emergence of city which in its early life phase exits in an organic way, i.e. it is intertwined with living nature, by using the Spenglerian metaphor, it grows out from the fertile soil: “Never has the feeling of earth-boundness, of the plantwise-cosmic, expressed itself so powerfully as it did in the architecture of the petty early towns, which consisted of hardly more than a few streets about a market-place or a castle or a place of worship” (Spengler 1932 II: 92).

The Fall occurs when the *Soul of the city* (*Seele*) converts into *Spirit* (*Geist*). Spengler in his theory here borrows and transforms the opposition of *Life* (*Leben*) and *Spirit* which was the central motif of life-philosophies from the turn of century onward⁴. City metamorphoses from organic entity to anorganic one, breaks away from

³ “There are born destiny-men and causality-men. A whole world separates the purely living man — peasant and warrior, statesman and general, man of the world and man of business, everyone who wills to prosper, to rule, to fight, and to dare, the organizer or entrepreneur, the adventurer or bravo or gambler — from the man who is destined either by the power of his mind or the defect of his blood to be an “intellectual” — the saint, priest, savant, idealist, or ideologue <...>. Even the footfall of the fact-man sounds different from, sounds more planted than, that of the thinker, in whom the pure microcosmic can acquire no firm relation with earth” (Spengler 1932 II: 16).

⁴ To this problem see Gilbert Merlio’s book where he calls our attention to the fact that Spengler, in the period of writing of *Man and Technics*, identifies the age of *Geist* with the era of modern technology. He points out as well that the peculiar Spenglerian *logophobia*, i.e. the aversion to discursive thinking is the consequence of his affinity to the life-philosophies (Merlio 1980: 110).

its mother, the breeding soil; the mythic era of harmonic, peaceful coexistence with nature is replaced with the age of hostile opposition to her. But do not let us leave aside! This opposition of the two ages concerning the human relation to nature, contrary to appearance, is not the result of an ecological approach. Spengler's starting point is a mythological scheme with the opposition of blood and soil to the anorganic, artificial state of civilization. The transition from the age of soul to the age of spirit takes place at the end of the epoch of culture city. Koktanek points out that this periodization subsisted in a personal experience. In 1906 Spengler paid a visit to Paris and the city charmed him totally; he wrote enthusiastically about it to his sister. This time onward he set up a dichotomy between Paris and Berlin; the former is the world city of the age of accomplishing and the same time dying culture, the latter is the metropolis of the age of emerging civilization (Koktanek 1968: 91–92).

This dichotomy is connected to the high appreciation of baroque culture. The baroque, in Spengler's theory, is the golden age of Western culture. In *The Decline of the West* the high baroque of the 18th century appears as a rich autumn; this is the time of harvest in the history of the West:

“With this epochal turn the State, which as a possibility is inherent in every Culture, was actualized and attained to such a height of “condition” as could neither be surpassed nor for long maintained. Already there is a quiet breath of autumn in the air when Frederick the Great is entertaining at Sans Souci. These are the years too, in which the great special arts attain to their last, most refined, and most intellectual maturity — side by side with the fine orators of the Athenian Agora there are Zeuxis and Praxiteles, side by side with the filigree of Cabinet-diplomacy the music of Bach and Mozart” (Spengler 1932 II: 391).

The transition from culture to civilization, in the historical philosophy of Spengler, is deeply ambivalent. It is more than to be mere decline. “Civilization is the destiny of every culture”, – writes Spengler in a rather enigmatic way. Civilization, in this respect, is some kind of consummation or fulfillment⁵. Spengler refuses the stamp of pessimism. Who is pessimist, he writes, does not have a task to be fulfilled. Germans, in his philosophy, have to wrestle with an enormous task; in the approaching age of civilization they have to found the *Imperium Germanicum*. Their historical role is to emulate the achievement of the ancient Rome, and to establish a world empire which inevitably stands at the end of history of every civilization. Spengler's open enthusiasm concerning imperialism was more than a personal idiosyncrasy; many contemporaneous German intellectuals shared this sentiment. Imperialism seemed to be necessity for the newcomer Germany among the traditional colonizing great powers. Imperialism, in the historical philosophy of Spengler, is moral duty for Germany and the inevitable fact of the age of civilization.

⁵ Spengler in German writes: “Aber gibt es Menschen, welche den Untergang der Antike mit dem Untergang eines Ozeandampfers verwechseln. Der Begriff einer Katastrophe ist in dem Worte *nicht* enthalten. Sagt man statt Untergang Vollendung, ein Ausdruck, der im Denken Goethes mit einem ganz bestimmten Sinn verbunden ist, so ist die “pessimistische” Seite einstweilen ausgeschaltet, ohne daß der eigentliche Sinn des Begriffs verändert worden wäre” (Spengler 1937: 63–64).

However, civilization means a radically new period whose essence is diametrically opposed to the epoch of culture. Their relation is described by oppositional notion-pairs: *life – spirit, organic – anorganic, religious belief – atheism*. The latter opposition is noteworthy because the problem of religious belief, in Spengler’s historical philosophy, is connected with the dichotomy of country-side and metropolis. The openness of human being to transcendence is deduced from the human sense of death⁶. Religion as social institution and religious symbolism are the consequences of *Scheu* which means at the same time respect and abhorrence (Spengler 1932 II: 123, 167). True religious belief comes from heart and not from intellect; as such it is impossible for the people of metropolis in the age of civilization because their existence has been dominated by mechanistic intellect. Koktanek points out that this conception concerning the problem of belief and atheism is presumably the projection of Spengler’s personal distracting life-problem. In his unpublished autobiography he confessed that he had been suffering to be unable for belief in God. When he was 10 years old he suddenly woke up the truth that God himself was only a word and it was a very painful experience for him (Koktanek 1968: 36–38).

The phase of culture is deeply imbibed with religious belief, the era of civilization, contrary to it, is atheistic. The spontaneous, unreflected religious belief is dwelling in the countryside ; in the city it becomes an intellectual, reflected phenomenon:

“But the last reformers, too, the Luthers and Savonarolas, were urban monks, and this differentiates them profoundly from the Joachims and the Bernards. Their intellectual and urban asceticism is the stepping-stone from the hermitages of quiet valleys to the scholar’s study of the Baroque. The mystic experience of Luther which gave birth to his doctrine of justification is the experience, not of a St. Bernard in the presence of woods and hills and clouds and stars, but of a man who looks through narrow windows on the streets and house walls and gables. Broad God-perfused nature is remote, outside the city wall; and the free intellect, detached from the soil, is inside it. Within the urban, stonewalled waking-consciousness sense and reason part company and become enemies, and the city-mysticism of the last reformers is thus a mysticism of pure reason through and through, and not one of the eye — an illumination of concepts, in presence of which the brightly coloured figures of the old myth fade into paleness” (Spengler 1932 II: 297–298).

Atheism of the metropolis is an inevitable end result; it is the necessary way of life for metropolitan civilization. Paradoxically, at the end of the life-cycle of every civilization, as a consequence of the failure of urban rationalism, reemerges the need for religious revival. But this results in some kind of substitute religion: “saloon Buddhism, spiritualism and theosophy” which are only the symptoms of the crisis of civilization.

The age of civilization brings along the domination of city over its countryside, the domination of bourgeois over nobility, the domination of atheism over religion and

⁶ “To death, as the common lot of every human being born into the light, adhere the ideas of guilt and punishment, of existence as a penance, of a new life beyond the world of this light, and of a salvation that makes an end of the death-fear. In the knowledge of death is originated that world-outlook which we possess as being men and not beasts” (Spengler 1932 II: 16).

the domination of democracy over aristocratic rule, that is to say, the domination of quantity over quality concludes Spengler, mixing historic description with evaluation. This outcome, in the age of late culture, is not yet univocal but the finite victory of the spirit over the soul forecasts its shadow. Human being does not live any more in harmony with original nature; he domesticates and transforms it, subjugating it to the needs of urban environment:

“Extra muros, chaussees and woods and pastures become a park, mountains become tourists’ view-points; and intra-muros arise an imitation Nature, fountains in lieu of springs, flower-beds, formal pools, and clipped hedges in lieu of meadows and ponds and bushes. In a village the thatched roof is still hill-like and the street is of the same nature as the baulk of earth between fields. But here the picture is of deep, long gorges between high, stony houses filled with coloured dust and strange uproar, and men dwell in these houses, the like of which no nature-being has ever conceived. Costumes, even faces, arc adjusted to a background of stone. By day there is a street traffic of strange colours and tones, and by night a new light that outshines the moon. And the yokel stands helpless on the pavement, understanding nothing and understood by nobody, tolerated as a useful type in farce and provider of this world’s daily bread” (Spengler 1932 II: 94–95).

The basic trend of civilization, says Spengler, is the process of uprooting (*Entwurzelung*) which results in the separation from cosmic forces and nature⁷. During this process the mode of existence for human being changes in a radical way. Nature and humanity come into antagonism with each other. This assertion seems to be very familiar with environmentalism. Is it possible that in Spengler we have to honor one of the forerunners of ecological thought? Undeniable such kind reading of Spenglerian texts lends itself to the interpreter. Spengler in his late work, *Man and Technics*, strikes a tone which strongly resembles to ecological approach of our time. The civilization of metropolis here appears as a matricide that kills Gaia; its behavior endangers the planet Earth:

“The mechanization of the world has entered on a phase of highly dangerous over-tension. The picture of the earth, with its plants, animals, and man, has altered. In a few decades most of the great forests have gone, to be turned into news-print, and climatic changes have been thereby set afoot which imperil the land-economy of whole populations. Innumerable animal species have been extinguished, or nearly so, like the bison; whole races of humanity have been brought almost to vanishing-point, like the North American Indian and the Australian. *All things organic are dying in the grip of organization. An artificial world is permeating and poisoning the natural. The Civilization itself has become a machine that does, or tries to do everything in mechanical fashion*” (Spengler 2002a: 93–94).

But do not jump to an unsound conclusion! It is not in the intention of Spengler to stop this devastating process: the victory of the nature-hostile metropolitan

⁷ Spengler, according to Merlio, in *Man and Technics* interprets technological advancement as the drama of *Entwurzelung* and hybris; the overdeveloped rationality is fatal for humanity who will perish from the tyranny of intellect (Merlio 1980: 107).

civilization, in fatalistic Spenglerian philosophy of history, is necessary. The Faustian Western civilization is inevitable and brings along the world of technology. In *Man and Technics* Spengler remarks with aversion that a “weariness is spreading, a sort of pacifism of the battle with Nature” (Spengler 2002a: 97)⁸. If the period of civilization in a sense, for Spengler, means decline, it is definitely not for ecological reasons; the cause of it is in his “pan-political” attitude. Spengler regrets that economy supplants, in the era of civilization, politics. Undeniable, Spengler is conservative – he is one of the protagonists of “conservative revolution”, but this conservatism is far from being a traditional one. Thomas Mann is right: Spengler’s attitude to civilization is some kind of *Hassliebe* – he is enthusiastic about it and hates it at the same time. His ideal is the hierarchical society of the Middle Ages where everyone had a predetermined place and society was a living organism. Person was not individual but a functional unity of the wholeness. At the end of the Middle Ages this well-formed society, which had existed as some kind work of arts, was disintegrated. Political leadership, had previously been possessed by nobility, slipped into the hands of urban bourgeoisie. Using Spengler’s terminology: “The powers of intellect and money set themselves up against blood and tradition” (Spengler 1932 II: 449).

The victorious metropolis, says Spengler, becomes a center around which the whole world will be reorganized. Country-side has been doomed to failure from the beginning; metropolis transforms the Earth physically, economically and politically. The symbol of this new power in intellectual field is *rationalism*, in political field is *democracy* and in economic field is *money*. The main characteristic of this process is that these forces are uprooted from tradition. For Spengler uprootedness and liberty are the same. Spengler’s disgust at rationalism, democracy and money has been embodied in some kind of aesthetical refusal. Metropolis, in his philosophy, appears as the earthly re-incarnation of the hell; this is true for the late ancient Rome and, as well, the modern megalopolis of the 20th century:

“But always the splendid mass-cities harbour lamentable poverty and degraded habits, and the attics and mansards, the cellars and back courts are breeding a new type of raw man – in Baghdad and in Babylon, just as in Tenochtitlan and today in London and Berlin” (Spengler 1932 II: 102).

⁸ This enervation is dangerous, because in Spengler’s opinion, leads to the fall of the “white race” and the emergence of the “colored races”. The notion of a “race”, Spengler declares, is not a biological one: “In race there is nothing material, but something cosmic and directional, the felt harmony of a Destiny, the single cadence of the march of historical Being” (Spengler 1932 II: 165). However, it remains a mystical conception: “A race has roots. Race and landscape belong together. <...> Men migrate, and their successive generations are born in everchanging landscapes; but the landscape exercises a secret force upon the plant nature in them, and eventually the race-expression is completely transformed by the extinction of the old and the appearance of a new one” (Spengler 1932 II: 119). Spengler in his book entitled *The Hour of Decision* (in German *Jahre der Entscheidung*) which was published in the Hitler-era explicitly refused anti-semitism and biological race theory: “But in speaking of race, it is not intended in the sense in which it is the fashion among anti-Semites in Europe and America to use it today: Darwinistically, materially Race purity is a grotesque word in view of the fact that for centuries all stocks and species have been mixed <...>” (Spengler 2002b: 219). However, as Detlef Felken points out, “race” remains an ambiguous term in Spenglerian oeuvre (Felken 1988: 218).

It is the mob, Spengler explains, who are swarming on the streets of the metropolis, a formless crowd of individual atoms grouping into short-lived constellations lacking any inner cohesiveness. This hell-like dwelling charms its inhabitants who are unable to break this emaciating spell:

“Once the full sinful beauty of this last marvel of all history has captured a victim, it never lets him go. Primitive folk can loose themselves from the soil and wander, but the intellectual nomad never. Homesickness for the great city is keener than any other nostalgia. Home is for him any one of these giant cities, but even the nearest village is alien territory. He would sooner die upon the pavement than go “back” to the land. Even disgust at this pretentiousness, weariness of the thousand-hued glitter, the *taedium vitae* that in the end overcomes many, does not set them free. They take the City with them into the mountains or on the sea. They have lost the country within themselves and will never regain it outside” (Spengler 1932 II: 102).

Spengler is much stricter to the metropolis than, for instance, Lewis Mumford, the renounced coeval city-historian and cultural critic. Mumford shudders at the dwelling-condition of the ancient Rome as well, but remarks: a city which was so deeply loved by its inhabitants must have possessed some kind of beauty⁹. However, in Spengler’s philosophy the final victory of metropolis over the city of culture is inevitable:

“The stone Colossus “Cosmopolis” stands at the end of the life’s course of every great Culture. The Culture-man whom the land has spiritually formed is seized and possessed by his own creation, the City, and is made into its creature, its executive organ, and finally its victim. This stony mass is the absolute city. Its image, as it appears with all its grandiose beauty in the light-world of the human eye, contains the whole noble death-symbolism of the definitive thing-become. The spirit-pervaded stone of Gothic buildings, after a millennium of style-evolution, has become the soulless material of this daemonic stone-desert” (Spengler 1932 II: 99).

Conclusions

Metropolis is the symbol of civilization which brings along the falling apart of the former shapes of culture. Civilization is the age of shapelessness. This assertion suggests that a well-functioning society, for Spengler, first of all is a work of art whose beauty is rooted in its well-shaped being. The harmonious co-existence of different estates in society, for him, is an aesthetic category. The way of life of the society of metropolis is shapeless which is diametrically opposed to the mode of being of pre-modern society. The contemplation of the latter creates aesthetic delightfulness in the viewer. The shapelessness of the way of life in the metropolis is the consequence of the cutting of the roots which have been stretched to the soil of former culture.

⁹ “Yes: when the worst has been said about urban Rome, one further word must be added: to the end men loved her, even the saintly Jerome. When she was only shadow of her former self, wrinkled and grizzled, like Rodin’s old courtesan, they remembered still the immense vitality and charm of matronhood, if not the blotched innocence of her youth. Nothing that man have once loved can be wholly vile; and what they have continued to love over the centuries must, in the face of all appearances, have been somewhat lovable” (Mumford 1961: 238).

Shapelessness manifests itself in the substitute-likeness of cosmopolitan life. Every activity of the dwellers of metropolis is only a false, poor-quality substitute of by-gone vigorous and meaningful activities. The cultural criticism of Spengler has been concentrated upon the caustic and satiric critique of modern representative democracy of 19th–20th centuries (about this problem see Stutz 1958: 112). Modern democracy, in Spengler's interpretation, is the domination of the oligarchic parties, which can only be sustained through rough manipulation of the masses. The main target of his attack is the modern press:

“What is truth? For the multitude, that which it continually reads and hears. A forlorn little drop may settle somewhere and collect grounds on which to determine “the truth” — but what it obtains is just its truth. The other, the public truth of the moment, which alone matters for effects and successes in the fact-world, is today a product of the Press. What the Press wills, is true <...> Its bases are irrefutable for just so long as money is available to maintain them intact” (Spengler 1932 II: 461–462).

Democracy, in Spengler's interpretation, is a special form of will-to-power appearing in the guise of money. Democracy, in other respect, is a self-eliminating process; it results in caesarism, personal domination which brings to its end the life-cycle of a given culture. It is the end of history. The course of chronological time is rolling on from the past through the present into the future, but it is not historical time any more:

“With Caesarism history relapses back into the historyless, the old beat of primitive life, with endless and meaningless battles for material power <...> which differ only in unessentials from the events of beast-life in a jungle” (Spengler 1932 II: 339).

The sterility of metropolitan civilization is permeating into all spheres of life: it is not only cultural but physical sterility in which Spengler sees the sign of the metaphysical will to death of the inhabitants of metropolises. The birth rates keep falling in an irresistible way and the metropolis, after passing of some generations, changes into necropolis. The Spenglerian vision of history concludes in a picture resembling to the scene of a post-nuclear age familiar from science-fiction movies:

“With the formed state, high history also lays itself down weary to sleep. Man becomes a plant again, adhering to the soil, dumb and enduring. The timeless village and the “eternal” peasant reappear, begetting children and burying seed in Mother Earth — a busy, not inadequate swarm, over which the tempest of soldier-emperors passingly blows. In the midst of the land lie the old world-cities, empty receptacles of an extinguished soul, in which a historyless mankind slowly nests itself. <...> Only with the end of grand History does holy, still Being reappear. It is a drama noble in its aimlessness, noble and aimless as the course of the stars, the rotation of the earth, and alternance of land and sea, of ice and virgin forest upon its face. We may marvel at it or we may lament it — but it is there” (Spengler 1932 II: 435).

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NUODĖMINGO MIESTO MITAS O. SPENGLERIO KULTŪROS KRITIKOJE

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Santrauka

O. Spengleris buvo vienas iš svarbiausių XX a. kultūros kritikos atstovų. Jo kūryba buvo įsaknyta vokiečių ikikarinio laikotarpio ir karo metų intelektualinėje atmosferoje. Vokiškoji tradicija, pagrįsta ambivalentišku santykiu su modernybe, po skaudaus vokiečių pralaimėjimo Pirmajame pasauliniame kare, iškilo kaip „konservatyviosios revoliucijos“ judėjimas. Naujas konservatizmo tipas, viena vertus, entuziastingai sveikino technologinį progresą, kita vertus, atmetė socialinę ir politinę modernizaciją. Priešprieša tarp miesto ir kaimo buvo pagrindinė diskusijų tema. Šiose diskusijose Spengleris su savo „pasaulio istorijos morfologija“ užėmė iškilą vietą. Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma Spenglerio teorijos rekonstrukcija.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: cezarizmas, civilizacija, konservatyvioji revoliucija, kultūra, saulėlydis, demokratija, pasaulio istorijos morfologija, progresas.

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