

## **Simple Vision, Quadruple Vision and Social Progress in Roszak's Thought**

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### **Abstract**

*This article elaborates the models of social progress discussed in the work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American thinker and sociologist, Theodore Roszak<sup>1</sup>, who is renowned for having coined the term 'counter-culture'. Roszak studies contemporary society dominated by industrialism founded upon science. Man's increasingly profound dependence upon and submission to the principle of scientific reality stimulates Roszak to highlight the role of romantic vision and that of the imagination in contrast to the simple vision; the latter is defined by Roszak as the "orthodox consciousness of urban industrialisation". The present qualitative study will focus upon the reasoning of Roszak regarding these two models of progress, Simple vision and Quadruple vision, while taking into account their significance in contemporary society.*

### **Introduction:**

*Where the Wasteland Ends* is the work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American sociologist, Theodore Roszak, who takes up the thinking of the first modernists and develops his own enriching arguments about the junction of 'modernity – modern scientific thought'.<sup>2</sup> In dealing with the experiment of modernity in this monumental work, he studies the relationship between policy and transcendence in post-industrial society and declares that urban industrialism has failed as a cultural experiment. He criticises the dehumanising character of modern thought and retraces the evils brought to society during the four preceding centuries of science. He develops his critique more specifically on the thought of the founders of modern science, in particular Francis Bacon<sup>3</sup>, Descartes, Galileo, and Newton. Proclaiming

the usefulness and the dominance of imagination, which is deeply ignored according to the rules of modern science, he favours the ideas of Romantics such as William Blake, Goethe, and Wordsworth. The basis of his argument starts from 'simple vision', the term which he borrows from Blake<sup>4</sup> contrary to that of 'quadruple vision'.

The simple or rational vision of modern science practised by the modernists is characterised by its rational nature: it is to reduce reality to quantities, to regard as real all that can be reasoned, and to reject all that is irrational and without reason. Quadruple vision, traditionally that of the Romantics, is identified by its creative nature, by its capacity to see the hidden meanings of things, by the depth of its spirit. We are going to employ the same terms to see how Roszak brings forth his criticism of modern science and consciousness.

The work of Roszak could be treated as a sort of 'manifesto' of counter-culture, which studies contemporary society dominated by industrialism founded upon science. In his opinion, we find ourselves at a turning-point in history "from where we can at last see where the wasteland ends and where a new culture of human wholeness and fulfilment begins".<sup>5</sup> He identifies the correlation between the social order and the soul considering that the destiny of our soul is the destiny of the social order; a withering soul weakens its social circle. This is the reason for which the author emphasises the spiritual regeneration of the soul, the creative imagination – for which he employs the term 'quadruple vision'. Man's increasingly profound dependence upon and submission to the principle of scientific reality stimulates Roszak to highlight the role of romantic vision and that of the imagination as opposed to simple vision; the latter is defined as "the orthodox consciousness of urban-industrialism" (Roszak, T. 1972). But for Blake, simple vision represents only "that narrowing of the sensibilities we often refer to as 'alienation' today" (Roszak, T. 1972)<sup>6</sup>. Roszak considers Blake as a rigid critic of modernity. On the other hand, he places Descartes in the ranks of the modernists: it is the viewpoint of Descartes which subordinates imagination to reason. Simple vision functions on the principle of reason and reflects that

which is real, and not imagined. Rejecting the role of dreams and of imagination, simple vision reduces reality to figures and quantities.

Quadruple vision, exercised essentially by Romantics, implies a creative vision which manifests itself largely in Romantic literature. Science does not correspond with quadruple vision and abstract ideas of the individual. It deals instead directly with reality, rejecting all notions of personal taste, of sentiments, of morality and of aesthetics. The field of science is endowed with simple vision in which intuition has no place. It is here that Roszak, sensing that imagination and intuition, faced with the domination of the simple vision of science, risk being lost, undertakes to honour the creative and imaginative role of Romanticism. The options that he offers are very categorical: he proposes to select either calculation (the Simple vision of science), or poetry (the Romantic vision); in other words, it's either head or heart, simple vision or quadruple vision, either Bacon and Newton, or Blake and Goethe<sup>7</sup>.

Roszak maintains that the simple vision does not give space to any intuition or perception. It rather aims to comprehend reality through the quantification of its data. Consequently, the reality is reduced to mere quantity. And it is this mathematisation of reality that Blake criticises. But the rejection of simple vision by Blake is not an absolute rejection; for Blake, simple vision must integrate itself into the quadruple whole, i.e. "the naturalistic within the sacred" or in other words Newton's science should integrate within Blake's Imagination (Roszak, T. 1972).<sup>8</sup> While the world of Newton is composed of matter, of force, and of law, that of Blake is founded on real and mythical beings which fuse together and transform. This transcendent symbolism of Blake is also reflected in Goethe, who privileges perception by the 'eyes of the spirit' and it's from this point that the quadruple vision of Romantics is born. As Blake discards the simple vision, he also rejects 'the unholy trinity', composed of Bacon, Locke, and Newton who represent, according to Blake, the first adversaries of the visionary faculties, the founders of simple vision. Blake

considers Bacon, the advocate of the scientific revolution, as the greatest traitor of the human. It is through his new philosophy that Bacon envisages the transformation of world. Bacon encourages an impersonal attitude in our encounters with reality; this impersonal attitude is the very soul of scientific method. This act of depersonalisation eliminates the qualities of the soul which we would consider indispensable for human society. When Blake asks his reader to choose 'Blake or Bacon?' we can read explicitly that it is not a choice between two people; it would be better to reread the question to choose between Subjective imagination or Objective vision? Modern culture has already made its choice: it favours condemnation and closing of the doors of perception,<sup>9</sup> eliminating quadruple vision whose role is indispensable for the transcendence of humanity. We can refer towards the following verses of Blake which reveal the essential elements of the imaginative and perceptive faculties:

Unless the eye catch fire,  
Then God will not be seen  
Unless the ear catch fire,  
Then God will not be heard  
Unless the tongue catch fire,  
Then God will not be named  
Unless the heart catch fire,  
Then God will not be loved  
Unless the mind catch fire,  
Then God will not be known.<sup>10</sup>

The parallel between the contrast of Blake against Newton and Bacon, and quadruple vision against simple vision is evident. We may then conclude that this is a debate between the modernists and their critics for Roszak. The standard-bearers of modernity are presented through the thought of Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke; those who disdain and defy the thoughts of the modernists are Blake, Goethe, and Wordsworth. The modernists do not give any serious attention to dreams or to the visions experienced by the soul; on the contrary, they ally themselves to objective and scientific method and to radical thought. On the contrary, the Romantics consider reason to be a

part of the whole human mind without it being superior to intuition.

These critics reproach the modernists for the absence of “the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; [...] the generous impulse to act that which we imagine.”<sup>11</sup> On the plane of “evaluation and psychic participation... the scientific worldview remains as unidimensioned today as in the age of Bacon and Newton.” (Roszak, T. 1972). The text refers to Alexandre Koyré<sup>12</sup> who remarks in his review about Newton:

... The world of science, the real world, is no more seen ... Modern science broke down the barriers that separated the heavens and the earth ... But ... it did this by substituting for our world of quality and sense perception, the world in which we live and love and die, another world – the world of quantity, of refined geometry, a world in which, though there is a place for everything, there is no place for man.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Models of progress**

The concept of modernity is thus established in scientific thought whose founding Fathers include Bacon, Newton, Galileo, and Descartes, among others. Roszak criticises severely the principles and perspectives which govern scientific thought. However, he does admit that science is “the peculiar intellectual achievement” of the modern man and that industrialism founded upon science is “the west’s peculiar contribution to the world” (Roszak, T. 1972).. For him, the vast terrains of science are the harbingers of horrific possibilities which facilitate and accelerate destruction; they permit nothing but “sound logic, good prose and exact numbers.” (Roszak, T. 1972). The meaning of life that the romantics perceived did not concur with the measured and quantitative thought of modern science; this meaning of life is therefore rejected by science, principally because it cannot bring clarity and order according to the laws of Newton. It is also rejected because the figurative style of the Romantics, according to Locke, proposes only false ideas, sentimentalises the view and affects the judgement (Roszak, T. 1972). This is why Locke recommends

to avoid “imperfections and abuses of words.” (Roszak, T. 1972). Following the judgement of Roszak, this categorisation of the use of words strips the speech of its beauty and its poetic value. It is thus that he qualifies and distinguishes the simple vision of the modernists from the quadruple vision of the anti-modernists.

### **Model of the Simple Vision of Modern Science**

Following the discussion above, one may well state that simple vision manifests itself in opposition to intuition and imagination; it supports quantification and calculation. Scientific data has no imaginative or intuitive value; it aims rather at rationality. One notices that Roszak condemns this culture of modern science – which serves as a medium where modernity is nourished – because of his stance on simple vision. He maintains that simple vision is actually the egoistical and calculating principles of science towards which the occidental tradition is precipitating itself.

Simple vision ‘imperialises’ Man, in the same way that civilised cultures ‘imperialise’ the primitive cultures of the world. Under the sway of simple vision, the human mind perceives a world of calculation, maths and logic; the heart, well adapted to intuition, perceives things differently. This is the dichotomy in human nature, and it is a result of simple vision. The deterioration of these faculties of perception is the beginning of scientific objectivity which attains its apex with the complete conversion and reduction of occidental society to mechanics and industrialisation. This produces at the same time the artificial environment of industrialisation. Thus, each transformation of our consciousness is linked to a cultural revolution.

According to the biologist Jacques Monod, the scientific attitude implies the premise of objectivity which denies intuition any role in the universe. For him it is the only authentic source for arriving at reality. Basing itself upon this ‘single truth’, simple vision subordinates the human spirit with this radical rejection of the intuition.

The upper hand that simple vision gets over intuition and imagination in daily life leads to gaping holes in the comprehension of reality. There is but one, literal sense possible with simple vision; figures of speech, metaphors, symbols, poetry – all lose their hidden meaning and their depth. But when we regard the world and the constituent elements of social life in a figurative sense, several senses and various visions are possible, thanks to the intuitive and imaginative abilities of the human spirit.

Thus, states Roszak, it is the rejection of Man's intuitive powers that persuades Blake to reject the three great minds of scientific thought: Bacon, Locke, and Newton, the founding fathers of simple vision. We may well wonder why Blake gives so much importance to Bacon in order to criticise this; Bacon is only marginally considered in the official studies of philosophy and in the history of science, with very rare references to his invention of inductive logic or to the discovery of his experimental method. Descartes surpasses him with his principles of modern philosophy; Galileo preceded him in the development of experimental science. Bacon has nothing but his literary talents. But « ce traître de l'esprit humain » as Blake calls him, offers to the future of science the moral, aesthetic and psychical elements of the scientific outlook. His humanitarian intentions with their hidden dehumanising nuances are elaborated in his *new philosophy*, the *Novum Organum*<sup>14</sup>. Bacon intends to transform the world with his new philosophy. He aims to construct a true model of the world in the human consciousness, not the one that Man desires, but the one that exists in reality. According to him, the imaginary and fictitious models that Man has created in the philosophical system deserve to be discarded; and to do this, Man must cultivate an impersonal attitude in his encounters with reality. This requires the cultivation of simple vision, and constitutes the focal point of Blake's critique on Bacon.

In fact, it is not really Bacon who is criticised by Blake; it is rather his concept of simple vision, the concept of modernity founded on his vision of science. Blake accuses Bacon of triggering a revolution in the human consciousness, whence

emerged the tendency towards an urban-industrial world – which we witness in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the spread of industry, of technology, and with rapid urbanisation. Blake accuses Bacon of having spread, through his *Novum Organum*, a depersonalising and quantitative vision of nature, just like the scientific thought of Galileo. Galileo looks at the world only through his calculations and figures. All other information, without figures, is considered unscientific, and is necessarily annexed to the sombre and insignificant domain of the spirit.

Blake's criticism also highlights the homogeneous vision of the world which finds itself reduced henceforth to quantities. Modernity has clad the universe in a uniform cosmos which is, in its vast expanses, bare of the aesthetic, of its enchanting circles and of its quintessence. The neutrality of the modern world does not permit anything but quantitative data to be dealt with by its systems. It is the sovereignty of simple vision (which is behind every impersonal and calculated outlook) that provokes Blake to condemn the modern thought of Bacon. Modern science has, without a doubt, made great discoveries in the universe, but it has succeeded only in substituting the world of sensibility and perception with a world of quantity, of mathematics, and of figures.<sup>15</sup>

On one hand, simple vision has made scientific evolution possible, offering higher and higher degrees of power and the possibility of living in a dynamic world; on the other hand, it has wrung the society dry of all spirituality, has transformed it into a desert deprived of meaning and of the metaphysics of science. Roszak studies the causes responsible for the disappearance of spirituality from our daily lives, this essential element of our culture. He reviews the effects of this elimination on human society and spirit, and elaborates the factors which can save urban-industrial society from self-destruction.<sup>16</sup> He prompts the reader to regard this self-destruction as the fruit of simple vision.



### **Model of the Quadruple Vision of the Romantics**

This model is in contrast with that of simple vision: simple vision is one-dimensional, quadruple vision is multidimensional; it displays its potential for fecundity and creativity in Romantics such as Wordsworth, Blake, Goethe, Saint-Exupéry. Roszak takes side with the Romantics, especially with Blake as he directs his attacks against modern science, against simple vision, mathematisation of reality, and the quantification of nature. Roszak's intention is to save the faculty of intuition and imagination, which is in peril. In this regard, Roszak quotes the words of Bacon : "God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world"<sup>17</sup> Defending Blake's point of view, Roszak presents his arguments to value imagination, in the footsteps of Blake. The following verses from Blake will suffice to show how he feels about the imagination:

To see a World in a grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.<sup>18</sup>

or Blake, the imagination is like the 'divine corps' of Christ and its persecution represents another crucifixion. And yet he confirms that this imagination is present in science: it is at the heart of the imaginative instinct of Copernicus who proposed the idea of the terrestrial globe in motion; it is the imagination thanks to which Newton suggested the first universal laws of nature; imagination also played a role in the thought process of Darwin before he proposed his theory of natural selection. This reasoning by Roszak renders science as the fruit of imagination and certifies the central role of the faculty of imagination in today's scientific success. One thing that seems unacceptable for Roszak is the idea of according sole primacy to scientific method and modern thought. All of his criticism of modernity is concentrated around the defence of the role of the imagination in the evolution and the progress of contemporary society.

In this regard, the bitterness towards the modernists that we witness in the words of Roszak is justified when he recounts

the modernists. But according to Roszak, it is Bacon whose rejection of the imagination is more severe, more forceful than that of Descartes: “Whosoever shall entertain high and vaporous imaginations instead of a laborious and sober enquiry of truth, shall beget hopes and beliefs of strange and impossible shapes” (Roszak, T. 1972). For Bacon, the imagination is the domain of poetry. That is why he explains the characteristics of poetry as well: it “feigns unrealities”; it is “unrestrained by laws” i.e. the laws of science; it is “pre-eminently the activity of weak-minded primitives”<sup>19</sup>(Roszak, T. 1972). This is why poetry I held in higher esteem in ignorant ages and in feeble-spirited societies, remarks Bacon. And here we come to the core of the contrast between simple vision of science and quadruple or imaginative vision in his criticism.

Based on the simple vision of modern scientific thought, Roszak constructs the image of the concept of modernity. He unveils and indicts the reasoning given by the defenders of modernity in favour of rational thought and modern science. The role of rationality has been criticised by the anti-modernists, who defend and favour intuition. The faculty of intuition and imagination, which Roszak calls quadruple vision, is the reason of multiple successes of man to date. Thanks to this faculty of intuition that man owes today his discoveries of new trails, whether in the domain of science or in arts. One finds the support of this argument in Blake’s thought who highlights the infinite and eternal character of intuitive and imaginative power. The criticism accompanying this debate that we find in the work of Roszak, blames modernity for its role in the creation of a vacuum in which the essential hues of eternity and of the infinite are absent. Given the reasons for which Roszak rejects the simple vision of modern thought, we may undoubtedly address his reasoning and his defence for a model of progress based on quadruple vision for the progress of our society today. The current image of the world since the 70s up to now serves only to support the thinking of Roszak against simple vision. However, Roszak is not categorical in this rejection and realises the need and usefulness of simple vision – on the condition that it should be employed under the sovereignty of quadruple vision. It would be apt rather to

suggest that these two visions bear, at the end of the day, the answers which humanity needs, confronted by today's social crisis!

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Theodore ROSZAK, (1933-2011), 20<sup>th</sup> century sociologist and writer, professor of history at the University of California. He popularised the concept of 'Counter-culture' in 1969 through his book *The making of Counter Culture* which elaborates the European and American counter-culture of the 60s.
- <sup>2</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>3</sup> Francis Bacon : 1561-1626, English philosopher and one of the pioneers of the modern scientific thought. Bacon, F., & In Fowler, T. *Novum organum*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1889
- <sup>4</sup> William Blake : 1757-1827, English poet of Romantic period. Bloom, H., *William Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. New York: Chelsea House. 1987.
- <sup>5</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>6</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>7</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>8</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>9</sup> Ref. to a quotation from Blake : "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite." in his work: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.
- <sup>10</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972
- <sup>11</sup> These are the arguments of the English Poet Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*. Percy Bysshe Shelley is the iconic figure of Romantic idealism of the 19th Century. Shelley, P. B., Jordan, J. E., & Peacock, T. L. *A Defence of Poetry*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 1965.
- <sup>12</sup> A. Koyré : the science historian cum philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.-  
-- Koyré, A. *Newtonian Studies*. London: Harvard University Press. 1965
- <sup>13</sup> This is A. Koyré's essay on the Newtonian synthesis.
- <sup>14</sup> *Novum Organum*, a book by Francis Bacon, in Latin, appeared in 1620 ; he presents a new logic in opposition to that of the antique method of Aristotle. Bacon proposes a method for schooling the mind and advancing in the sciences and in the acquisition of knowledge.

Saint-Exupéry, A.. *Le petit prince* [The Little Prince]. Paris, France: Gallimard. 1943

<sup>15</sup> This substitution by a quantitative world appears vividly in Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. We can see the dominance of quantification and statistics in nearly all aspects of contemporary life : scientific, political, economic, social, and so on.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis by Roszak may be studied in tandem with the critique of modernity in the thought of Goethe, who presents the progress of this destruction alongside social development and the industrial revolution by means of his character Faust.

<sup>17</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co.1972

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> T. Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*. New York: Doubleday & Co.,1972