

Deconstructing World History

Allan Tarp, the MATHeCADEMY.net, June 2012

This YouTube video on postmodern deconstruction describes world history as the history of trade. First eastern lowland pepper and silk was traded with western highland silver, then eastern cotton was moved west and traded with northern industrial products, and finally electrons replaced the silver and cotton economy with an information economy.

Link: http://youtu.be/xQAdrI_CvyY

Screen 1 & 2

Bo: Welcome to the MATHeCADEMY.net Channel. And welcome to our series on postmodern deconstruction. My name is Bo. Today we look at world history where we address the question "World History is made by personalities - or is it?" And welcome to our guest, Allan, who uses postmodern deconstruction in his work.

Allan: Thank you Bo.

Bo: Allan, what does deconstruction mean to you?

Allan: To me, deconstruction means what it says, destruction and reconstruction. It is the method that is used by postmodern skeptical thinking that dates back to the ancient Greek sophists. The sophists warned against patronization that is hidden in choices that are presented as nature. So to avoid hidden patronization, false nature must be unmasked as choice. And to deconstruct then means to discover or to invent alternatives to choices that are presented as nature.

Bo: And what does postmodern mean to you?

Allan: It seems to me that we must distinguish between post-modernism and post-modernity. Post-modernism is what we do with our head, i.e. how we think about the world. And post-modernity is what we do with our hands, i.e. how we act in the world. To simplify, postmodernism is skepticism toward hidden patronization. And post-modernity is the social condition that was created by IT, information technology.

Screen 3

Bo: Thank you, Allan. Do you have a short answer to today's question?

Screen 4

Allan: To me, the short answer is that world History is made, not by personalities, but by silver and cotton and electrons. First silver created wealth from pepper and silk. Then cotton created welfare from machines. Finally electrons spread out productivity first and then information.

Bo: So it all began with silver?

Screen 5

Allan: Yes Bo. But first threatened apes in Africa transformed into humans that developed technology to master the surrounding threats. We have holes in the head to supply the stomach with food and the brain with information. Animals must do this individually. Humans share both. When the warm and humid gulf stream was sucked away from Africa to the north by the ice cap on the North Pole, the rainforest in Sahara disappeared. The lack of trees for rescue forced some apes to run away on two legs. This forced their brain to grow to keep the balance. Also it freed the forelegs transforming the fore-toes to fingers that can be used to hunt for food, to gather food, and to share food. And associating sounds with what you have in your hand developed a language to share information. So these apes slowly transformed into humans. And equipped with physical and mental graspers, humans developed their four cultures.

Bo: What do you mean by the four cultures?

Screen 6

Allan: The first culture was a hunter-gatherer culture using the hands to hunt and gather food as just mentioned. But then information about matter, especially about iron, allowed humans to develop artificial hands, i.e. tools. Tools replaced hunter-gatherer culture with agriculture, where humans themselves control nature's production of food. Then information about energy allowed humans to develop artificial muscles, motors. And combining the artificial hand with the artificial muscle, i.e. combining the tools with motors, created the machines replacing agriculture with industry by taking over the hard physical work. Finally, information about information allowed humans to develop an artificial brain, a computer. And combining the artificial hand with the artificial muscle with the artificial brain, i.e. combining tools with motors and with computers, created the artificial human, the robot, replacing industry with information culture by taking over physical and mental routine work.

Bo: But, Allan, where does the silver come in?

Screen 7

Allan: Well Bo. Transformed from apes to humans, people left Africa. Some went to the western highlands, but most went to the eastern lowlands made fertile by rivers. Lowland products as pepper and silk from India and China were traded with silver from Europe's highlands. The first silver mines were found outside Athens financing the Greek culture for one hundred years until they were emptied.

Bo: And then the Romans took over?

Screen 8

Allan: Yes, the Romans found silver in Spain, financing the Roman Empire until the mines were taken over by Vandals from the north settling in southern Spain, in Andalusia, the land of the Vandals. That made the Arabs very angry. In the trade between Europe and India, the Arabs were the middlemen making fortunes. The Vandals didn't care about pepper and silk so the trade stopped. This made the Arabs take the silver mines themselves together with North Africa.

Bo: So the lack of silver created the dark middle age?

Screen 9

Allan: Precisely! But then came the rebirth, the renaissance, in Italy, financed by German silver found in the silver dale in the Harz, giving name to today's dollar. However, silver only travels a short distance before nightfall where it must be protected by a strong castle. This split Germany and Italy up into hundreds of small principalities all deriving wealth from the silver stream. Additional wealth was created when Roman numbers were replaced with Arabic numbers. With Roman numbers you can add, but you cannot multiply. And multiplication allowed the Italians to set up banks creating wealth from interest.

Bo: But banks can go bankrupt?

Allan: Yes. And the Italian banks did when the Portuguese found the seaway to India south of Africa, with gold mines on the way. Here there were no Arab middlemen to increase the cost. So cheap Portuguese pepper forced Italy out of business. Spain had its own silver-mines; and once the Arabs were pushed out of Andalusia, Spain tried to find another sea route to India by going west.

Bo: And here they found the West Indies?

Screen 10 & 11

Allan: Indeed they did. But there was no pepper and no silk. In return there was lot of silver, e.g., in the land of silver, Argentina. The silver then was sailed home to Spain and used to finance religious

wars in Europe, helping the Catholic Church to try to win back northern Europe lost to the Reformation.

Bo: Allan, you also talked about cotton?

Screen 12

Allan: Yes, Bo. In England they had no silver, but being of Viking descent they knew how to sail, and they easily robbed the slow Spanish silver boats returning over the Atlantic. However, to get to India the Brits had to go on open sea to avoid the Portuguese fortifications on Africa's coast. Once in India they discovered that cotton was much cheaper than silk. So they brought back cotton plants to be planted in the southern states of their North American colonies. However, to grow cotton you also need a lot of labor. So the Brits had to buy labor in Africa to be sailed to North America as slaves.

Bo: So stolen silver was traded for stolen bodies?

Screen 13

Allan: Not exactly. The Brits exchanged slaves for guns produced by machines originally created to transform cotton into clothes. This new economy was a triangular trade. It was not based upon silver but upon exchange: Cotton for guns, guns for slaves, and slaves for cotton. And once machines were created to produce clothes, other machines were invented to produce other forms of goods in huge quantities, thus creating the foundation for a welfare society.

Bo: But machines also need a lot of labor?

Screen 14

Allan: They do. And the American civil war was about labor. Cotton is not made to be consumed by the workers, machine products are. So the agricultural South wanted low-paid workers to produce raw material to industrial states. And the industrial North wanted well-paid workers to consume the surplus production of the machines. In the end industry won over agriculture. So to keep up a supply of cheap cotton, the Brits moved the cotton to Africa and transformed Africa into colonies, thus creating a closed economy with the motherland by supplying it with cheap raw material and by consuming the surplus production of its industry.

Bo: It sounds like imperialism?

Screen 15 & 16

Allan: Which it was. It split the world up in three closed economies: An American, a British, and a French. And two nasty European civil wars, World War one and World War two, had to be fought before finally world trade was set free, so that not only Germany and Japan, but all countries can compete on equal terms.

Bo: Allan, you also talked about electrons?

Screen 17 & 18

Allan: Yes Bo. Things can be moved by our muscles; and by the artificial muscles, i.e. motors. Transforming water to steam produces pressure to move things by using a steam engine to deliver energy to motors in factories. However, production must take place close to the steam engine, so people had to move in to huge cities as Chicago, Birmingham, the Ruhr district, etc. But then a discovery was made: Metal contains tiny particles called electrons only visible when lightening. Connecting different metals will make electrons flow in a connecting wire, thus creating an electrical current. Winded up, a current becomes a coil that acts like an artificial magnet able to move other magnets. Steam doesn't travel long distances, but electrons do, so their moving ability allowed machines to be set up all over the world, thus spreading out productivity.

Bo: So using electrons to carry energy prevented large concentrations of population?

Allan: It did. Now people could work with machines wherever they lived.

Bo: Allan, you also talked about information?

Screen 19 & 20

Allan: Yes, Bo. With electrons a lamp can have two states; it can be on and off. This can be used to represent numbers. Counting takes place in bundles, thus 456 means 4 ten-bundles of ten-bundles, and 5 ten-bundles and 6 unbundled ones. However, instead of counting in ten-bundles we can also count in two-bundles. Thus 5 can be bundled as 4 and 1, i.e. as 1 two-bundle of two-bundles, and no two-bundles, and 1 unbundled ones, which is the same as the number 101. So we can use electrons to carry information about numbers, and also to perform computations on these numbers, thus creating a computer as an artificial brain. And since physical and mental routine jobs can be described in numbers, computers can control machines to perform routine jobs. And a computer together with a machine becomes an artificial human, a robot.

Bo: But Allan, if the robots take over the production then what should people do?

Screen 21

Allan: This is today's big challenge. If not met, people will again be hunter-gatherers. In the morning they will hunt entertaining information on the internet and on the TV. And in the afternoon they will gather fast food at the super-market.

Bo: What a nightmare. I hope it will not come through.

Allan: It will not if robots taking over routine jobs make humans enlighten themselves especially about how hunter-gatherers can create a rich day without having to work.

Bo: But after the Enlightenment 18th century everybody is enlightened today?

Screen 22

Allan: They would have been had the Enlightenment century continued. But counter-enlightenment used forced line-organized education to stop Enlightenment from spreading from the two Enlightenment republics, the American and the French. However there is hope. But first Europe must replace its line-organized office-preparing education with North American's block-organized education that can uncover and develop the students' individual talents through daily lessons in self-chosen half year blocks.

Bo: But what happens if Europe keeps on to its line-organized education?

Allan: Then the problem will solve itself since forcing students to stay at a line produces many dropouts that have to go back to start if changing to another line. So instead of reproducing, Europe's students change lines. This makes Europe's educational system an exterminator that by reducing the birth rate to 1.5 child per family will wipe out Europe's population over 200 years.

Screen 23

Bo: So Allan, next time maybe we should deconstruct education?

Allan: That would be a very good idea, Bo.

Screen 24

Bo: Thank you Allan, for sharing with us your view on the question: World history is created by personalities – or is it? Next time at the MATHeCADEMY.net channel we will look at deconstruction of education. Again we will ask: Education must be line organized – or must it?