

ETHNOCENTRIC BELIEFS IN
THE CENTRE

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When speaking of centres in art we must make a distinction between cultural and geographical maps. Geographical peripheries are not always culturally definable.

We can't any more define the centre mainly on geographical grounds. This is not only due to the electric mass media which has transformed our world to Global village. Moreover it is the outcome of a new antropological awareness: one cannot escape ethnocentric belief-systems even in centres.

Ethnocentrism means that one is encircled by prejudices, beliefs and expectations of some close ethnic group. These beliefs formulate self-evident roles, which can be universalized far beyond that group. One belief or "myth" was essential part of the waning modernism: that there are some universally valid artistic principles which one can face everywhere, even among the "primitive" people.

The other prejudice, very common in modernism was/is that the art of the countries far from Europe or in the marginal areas of Europe, no matter is it abstract, semi-abstract or representative, is more effected by nature than the art of urban centres of Europe. The cliché of the "northern light" is the typical outcome of this kind of thinking. Clichés about the periphery are very often clichés about the nature.

When Nordic countries (Scandinavia and Finland) had to define

their peculiarity in art, it is always its closeness to nature.

Finnish people willingly want to hear this prejudice from the lips of some foreign expert in art. Any way, culture is as far from nature anywhere, even in periphery.

We can make a distinction between unproductive and productive ethnocentrism. The example of the unproductive ethnocentrism would be the conviction that my own beliefs embody the centre of my world. One can have this kind of attitude in the centre as well.

Productive side of the ethnocentrism is that we want to reveal the faults of our centristic prejudices, but at the same time we understand that we must mediate new intellectual modes and styles of urban centres to marginal (geographical) areas. But the problem is that the role of intermediary does not always imply the role of a critical distant-maker.

Ideas against any kind of centrisms contain a paradox. For example the postmodern idea that there are no centres any more, comes straight from centres. The happy escape of this pessimistic inference is that it could come from anywhere. Mike Featherstone has said: "To understand postmodernism (...) demands that we adopt a degree of reflexivity in which acknowledge the double role of symbolic specialists and cultural intermediaries."

No doubt the title of my paper is paradoxical. But there is no escape here: limits of the centre are spread so far that we mix our own ethnocentric beliefs with the beliefs of the centre.