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Vocation and subsistence

*towards a reconciliation
between simplicity and wealth*

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An essay in seven volumes

Each volume can be read separately. The same short introduction explains in each volume the orientation.

- 0) Community and self-limitation:
starting a move towards change.**
- 1) Effort and comfort:
towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity.**
- 2) Vocation and subsistence:
towards a reconciliation between simplicity and wealth.**
- 3) Recessive and dominant:
towards a reconciliation between feminine and masculine.**
- 4) Circular and linear:
towards a reconciliation between South and North.**
- 5) Knowledge and learning:
towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect.**
- 6) Spirit and matter:
towards a reconciliation between Reality and appearances.**

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CHANGE AS A SEARCH FOR TRUTH

This is the story of our own destruction and of how we can come back to life.

While the Universe since billions of years evolves towards more complexity and deeper awareness, our western society seeks for homogenisation and oblivion; while the Universe tends towards more subjectivity and stronger communion, we escape into illusion, dry materialism, individualism and competition. We need urgently to recognise that our society is truly regressive: we walk against the laws of nature and, instead of opening ourselves to the deep mystery of life, we escape into many ways of artificial self-destruction.

This essay tries simultaneously to describe in a simple way the complex desegregation of our modern western society and to propose simple practical ways of transformation of our patterns of development, through our attitudes and behaviours in our everyday life. On one hand, it will describe the many deep imbalances which are causing the deterioration of our living conditions and generating more and more injustice and suffering. On the other hand, it tries to propose another vision for a possible future, through very practical ways of changing our behaviours as citizens and consumers.

A necessity for change

Everyone sees the world in their own way. What is common between the Indian coolie, the Kalahari hunter, the New York lawyer and the old Inuit woman? They have such a different experience of life that they adopt very different perceptions and representations of what are the essential priorities in their own life, beyond a common necessity for surviving. Each one acts according to their own interests.

Privileges completely change our understanding of our situation and urge us to act in a certain way which in general tends to reinforce these same privileges.

Our world suffers terribly: exploitation, destruction of nature, hunger and precariousness for the poor, depression and boredom for the rich, dominance of market upon human values, repression of femininity, rejection of older people, loneliness for individuals, dissolution of community links, heavy materialism in rich societies, extreme rationalism, domination by technology, devaluation of intuition, reification of the body, lack of spiritual guidance. The list never finishes.

There is an urgent need for change. There is no more time for talk; it is time for action. Our survival itself is at stake. Our main problem is not how to know what to change and how to change it. We know already the solutions. They have only to be tested, implemented and improved. The main problem is in fact how to break resignation, how to start a move towards change. We seem to be trapped on the track of our own destruction. We seem to be incapable of reaction, as if we were paralysed. This is why this essay will attempt to provoke a change of mind in showing this terrible trend for self-destruction which inhabits us. This is certainly an ambitious aim, and it is clear that the reader can only absorb what he or she is ready to accept. It is hard to be convincing. Nevertheless the blunt description of our attitudes and values will show how our civilisation has become poorer and poorer and will describe another way of coming back to life. This essay will not talk so much to the head but to the heart, not only to frighten us but mainly to give us hope in so many possibilities for our future, if we accept the need for change.

This essay is a psychotherapy of our western society. I will try to describe our values, our attitudes and our behaviours by linking them with their original roots. It is certainly a work of interpretation which everybody will not necessarily agree with but it is yet a way to challenge our reflection and to urge us to see the causes of our behaviours. It is unavoidable that any therapy is always painful. These descriptions are not very flattering, but they should help everybody to see the truth about our common behaviours. It is certainly not an explanation which will suit everybody; it will be only an incentive to see the truth which will differ for each of us.

Truth is often hard to say and hard to hear. It certainly hurts, but it is also liberating. We must learn to be tender with people and ourselves, but hard with facts and attitudes. There cannot be any change without this effort to see things as they are, even if it is painful to recognise what is and how sick we are. Change can only happen when we change ourselves, when we look clearly at ourselves and at the consequences of our values, attitudes and acts. This is a spiritual path in the way it touches our deep nature, our vocation, our aspiration for happiness and for a better life, for ourselves and for others. Change cannot be lead by material considerations. It has to be guided by spiritual values like justice, peace, compassion. It is more rooted in our being than in our acting. It concerns more the nature of our personal or collective attitude than the question of the technical means we can implement. It is a philosophical choice.

I will show how self-limitation is the necessary path for change; on one hand because self-limitation helps to limit the negative impact we have on our natural and social milieu, but essentially on the other hand because it opens us and makes room for human values and for a personal and collective deepening. Most of the philosophical or spiritual traditions teach that self-limitation is the way to happiness.

Six imbalances

As a way to structure this essay, I have identified six main imbalances which threaten our world. I intend to describe each of these imbalances, one after the other, but I want to do this in a positive way, in order to demonstrate that these imbalances are not only a threatening problem for our survival but that they are also the key for the solution; each one of these six imbalances can be described as a special polarity between two terms, where one term (usually mentioned as the first) dominates the other term and prevents its expression: 1) humanity and nature, 2) wealth and simplicity, 3) masculine and feminine, 4) North and South, 5) intellect and subtle faculties, 6) appearances and Reality; it means that the domination of the first term over the second prevents the second to be fully expressed; thus the polarity also represents the key to the neglected potential of unexpressed faculties which challenge us to become more creative in order to express what has been lost; it is why these same polarities offer also the means for a deep transformation of our society; they will be described in the reverse order, where the second term (the weakest) will be mentioned first, as the guiding and changing force, and the other term will be mentioned in second, as the energy which has to adapt, in a form of reconciliation between the two concerned poles. According to this new order, these imbalances or polarities are the following:

- 1) Effort and comfort: towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity
- 2) Vocation and subsistence: towards a reconciliation between simplicity and wealth
- 3) Recessive and dominant: towards a reconciliation between feminine and masculine

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- 4) Circular and linear: towards a reconciliation between South and North
- 5) Knowledge and learning: towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect
- 6) Spirit and matter: towards a reconciliation between Reality and appearances.

Each of these parts will be presented as a separate book which can be read independently of the five others, in any order which suits the reader, according to his or her centres of interest.

A first volume as general introduction precedes these six parts and exposes the generalities concerning the orientation for change, especially in what concerns the dynamic of community and the necessity for self-limitation. This general part is called: *0) Community and self-limitation, starting a move towards change.*

The first pages of this first general volume are repeated in each volume in order to summarise the approach and to make it understandable irrespective of which volumes the reader will have read. The seven volumes form nevertheless a whole where references are made to what has already been written in more detail in the precedent parts, but in a way which does not necessitate having read it.

The risk of generalisations

In order to make things more evident, I will use generalisations. Any generalisation is never true, because there are always exceptions or even regular situations which can contradict it; it is only a finger pointing on a main characteristic which is hard to grasp because it is a dominant factor which is not always true. Generalisation is a good way to emphasise a dominating trend which can only be recognised

beyond complexity and diversity. It is why the reader should make the effort to accept this sometimes surprising form of simplification, in order to understand what is meant by the statement. The first reflex is generally to adopt a defensive attitude and to refute what is being described; this tendency is especially clear in psychotherapy as each insight about our own values and attitudes is a kind of menace for our personal stability and for our trend to reinforce wrong, but strongly integrated, behaviours or privileges.

I will try to describe our modern western society, which in fact does not exist as such anywhere, but I will nevertheless describe characteristics which we can identify in most of our western countries. As western society, I understand the rich nations which consume most of the world's wealth and dominate the world economically since the time when they have taken advantage of the industrial revolution and colonised the other continents. These nations are mainly the ones of North America and Europe, including Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Yet there is no clear boundary as there are many traditional - non western - societies within these nations and also many western aspects in poor countries, especially among the dominating elite.

In the same way of generalisation, I will talk about traditional societies. These are the societies which developed in the southern countries as well as the ones which were established in western countries before the development of market economy and before the industrial revolution. These societies are still at least partly alive nowadays in many more protected parts of western countries. We could define traditional societies as the ones which consume mainly what they are producing and which are guided by other values than by trends of mere materialistic accumulation. These societies, because they are fragile and acting mainly locally, are probably more

transparent. They should not be idealised, but they nevertheless represent a more human scale of development which can inspire us.

A testimony

This essay does not pretend to put forward an universal truth nor to describe the full range of most important aspects of our society. It is not an encyclopaedia of alternative living; who could have the knowledge to write such an essay? It is far more a testimony and a challenge. The tone may seem highly and heavily moralistic, but it is only a way to explain a personal truth. While taking a clear stand about the interpretation of what I observe in front of me and proposing precise ways to react to the terrible destruction of our environment and of our local communities, I will try to break the resignation and to provoke a move towards change.

In this way, each statement is more a point of view, a testimony and a challenge than the expression of an objective and absolute truth. Who could say what truth is? There are many expressions of truth (small t). Each one of us has his or her own truth (small t). These different truths can be even contradictory; they remain nevertheless valid. They compose, all together, a kind of gigantic mosaic which may try to represent the perennial Truth (capital T). In fact, although there are many personal truths (small t), there is only one perennial Truth (capital T), but there are many expressions of it which, despite their diversity and imperfections, have yet to conform to the perennial Truth (capital T). It means that our diversity is the key for everybody to bring their own special contribution to the expression of a complex picture which can only take shape because our personal or collective inputs of understanding and creativity are complementary, sometimes even antagonistic, but yet necessary to the whole picture.

Truth cannot be described with words, unless it is reduced to a mere simplified representation which our rational mind reconstructs artificially in its own limited way in order to describe the world with words, while letting unexpressed all the aspects it has not perceived. This representation is usually made possible by the simple addition of partial elements of understanding; it is thus necessarily ignoring what has not been perceived and it also lacks of a broader global understanding; as this representation becomes our map for acting in our daily life, it is evident that a map with so many holes and distortions can only lead us astray. This impossibility to describe the Truth is the reason why the oriental tradition has adopted the apophatic way as another way of expressing our perception of the world in avoiding to try to describe what reality consists of. It has done so in two different ways: first by saying what reality is not and second by indicating more the direction in which to search, using metaphors or poetical images, than trying to describe reality itself. I will adopt this double process in my essay.

First as the negative way - saying what reality is not - I will describe our daily practices and I will show how much they are flawed. This will be essentially a description of the negative impact of these practices (our use of energy, technology, money, power, knowledge, etc) and how much they are based on false premises. It is important to emphasise that these means are not bad as such and that the flaw consists mainly not in the tool itself but in the use we make of it; the criticism of our practices addresses more our purposes and needs than the means themselves. This first part of the way will seem very pessimistic as it will essentially insist on the negative aspects of our development. The apophatic (negative) way of saying what life is not is not an easy exercise because we are attached to our practices and to the privileges they allow us to consolidate. Our first reflex, when one dares to criticise our use of technology, of money or of power,

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consists in resistance; we refuse to see how much the flaw is real, how much our representations, our ways of thinking and living are destructive for one another and for ourselves, for our environment and for our social life. Yet the ecological cataclysm and the economic collapse we can observe around us tell us more than it is necessary about the urgency of changing these ways which are in heavy conflict with the laws of life and nature. This exercise of questioning our ways of life is made more difficult by the fact that our representation of the world and the justification of our ways of life are firmly consolidated in a rational construct which accepts no crack. It is like a fortress which prevents the unknown to enter, although, as I just described it, the major part of this representation keeps ignoring most aspects of life, as it is an artificial rational construction made by the addition of a limited number of simple parts. It is a left brain representation (i.e. a cerebral construction), while the right brain true presentation (i.e. direct perception) remains more in touch with the mysterious dimension of life we cannot grab but only experience¹. This struggle consists in the resistance of our left brain, which constructs a false image of the world and defends its rational simplified representation, against the freshness, openness and sensitivity of our right brain, whose lively experience of life comes to challenge the dead re-presentation created by our mind. This is an attempt by our fragile faculties of intuition and perception to force open our rational mind to more than just reason. We need this opening for our survival, especially for the survival of our intuitive and creative faculties, because we need urgently to recognise the collapse of our attempts to dominate the world, and we can only do so if we escape from our imprisonment in the fortress of our false representations and privileges by our rational mind. My purpose in describing our ways of life in a negative way, which will sometimes

be perceived as extreme and exaggerated, is to shaken the walls of the fortress and to create cracks and holes which can allow light to enter and widen our poor representations of life. We have first to question our rational picture and to get it shaken so much that it becomes then free to accept to review its radical and narrow stand; only under this condition it can become more open to new insights. Hindu and Buddhist traditions have never stopped teaching how we have to stop our mind in order to see the light.

Then, as second step on the apophatic way, once our mind is more open to new perceptions, I will try to describe in which direction we have to search for a new way of being. This will be made in a indirect way. When the finger shows the moon, we have to look at the moon, which remains mysterious, and not at the finger, which does not say much; each description of this path will seem therefore lacking consistence or being too idealist; the finger is not able to say what the moon is. We have to let resonate what our intuition and experience of the world tell us with what we have deep in us that we still ignore. Here again it is more a function of our right brain with its intuition, inspiration, creativity, love of globality that will allow us to see more widely. It is all about evoking what the true nature of life is (who knows what it is?) and showing how a better perception of its deep nature would change us completely as well as our ways of life.

I hope the reader will follow me on this steep double path, in accepting first to radically question very well established values and principles that ground our western ways of life and in accepting secondly to imagine another world that we intuitively know in ourselves but whose picture we are not very aware of. This can only be done if the reader accepts to let go of his or her own attachments to present comfort and to let surface in him or her these deep intuitions we all have about the true meaning of life. Life is not

¹ See the remarkable book by Iain McGilchrist: *The Master and his Emissary; The divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World*. Yale University Press, 2009.

something we produce, we create or we control; it exists beyond us and independently from us as a flow which nourishes us all; it is our true source of being. We can resist it and remain imprisoned in the fortress of our poor representations or we can open ourselves to it and let it irrigate our inner life. Opening to it does not require anything special from us; we have only to remove the obstacles to its flow, i.e. the walls of the fortress. As life is much beyond us, we can only choose either to resist it (a negation of life) or not to resist it (a negation of the negation of life). To access life we need “only” to remove the obstacles, i.e. the negation. It is why the cracks in the fortress of our rational representations are so essential: they break our resistance to life and let enter light into our lives. Freedom can only be experienced if we accept to open the fortress of our rational mind to the liveliness of our experience.

Because life cannot be explained, my contribution can only be limited to a personal expression of my perception, rooted in my own experience, with its many blind spots and its few insights. It is why, in this essay, I prefer to express my own point of view in a form of testimony and commitment. I hope the reader will accept to follow me and feel shaken. It is his or her own responsibility to adopt the stand he or she wants to: to resist or not to resist. Although it will make clear practical proposals, this essay will not propose recipes. The pragmatic aspect of these proposals is more a challenge in order to show that change is possible and within reach for anybody who wants to act. There are no universal solutions. Each person, each community, each culture has to reinterpret these challenges by integrating, transforming and adapting them, as well as implementing them in their own way. These proposals are therefore incentives in order to help people to find their own way.

Since my wife and I are living in Numbugga, near nature, on the far South Coast of New South Wales in Australia, we are trying to practise what is said in this essay. We do what is within our ability to implement the many options which constitute the core of this essay. The reflection which is proposed here is therefore not mere theory but real practice. Of course we are far from having solved all the problems we meet in everyday life and far also from practising an ideal way of life. One of the main unsolved problems remains, for instance, the question of a form of transport which would integrate into the natural cycles; although we begin to see roughly how it could be solved, it is still not a practical reality. And many other questions remain unsolved.

Statements, patterns and options

Instead of exposing each point as an argumentation that would start with a generality and would then develop the content until it reaches a conclusion that would content the main idea, I have preferred to formulate this main idea immediately at the start and then explain it. This kind of reversed structure seems more challenging as it starts at each new step with the main point - or a kind of conclusion - expressed in two short lines. Through this other way of proceeding this book proposes a whole range of successive main statements that work as so many patterns² of behaviours. Many of these patterns or statements are the expression of another understanding of our society; as such they provide a powerful incentive for change. They can be understood as so many options that emphasise the fact that the implementation of these proposals, after it has been adapted to the local culture and conditions, consists of a personal or collective choice which depends on us only and on the way we want to interact

² This approach has been inspired by the American architect Christopher Alexander: *A Pattern Language* (1977) and *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979), both at Oxford University Press, New York.

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with the world. As citizens and consumers, we are in fact the real actors of our world.

The description of these patterns starts with a title and a statement on two lines that summarise the concept or the option. Then each statement (or pattern) is explained in one or two paragraphs that explain the main concept. The further part of the text develops the idea in more detail. At the end of the book the reader can find a list of these statements with their titles and their two-line summary.

The proposed patterns or statements will be often described as lists of characteristics or of sub-options. Where I see 5 characteristics, someone else might see 4 or 6. It is not important. What is more central is the attempt to make reality more understandable and our respective influence more evident. These lists are inspired by the numerous lists in Buddhist teaching which describes for instance the 3 Jewels, the 4 Noble Truths, the 5 Aggregates. It can seem very presumptuous, but it is in fact more a humorous wink; reality is much more complex than the description we make of it. The simplification of our road map makes our action easier, but it does not make reality simpler so far. We are encouraged to act, but this should not be an illusion of mastery; it is only a way to break our resignation.

At the end of the volume the reader will find a summary of the main options under the form of a list of possible commitments that any individual or local community can follow in order to practice a way of life which conforms to the spirit of this essay. This sort of rule can help in a very practical way a community to start to implement change. It is not the solution but it can help as a first base for discussion. The necessity for change is understood as the precious opportunity to reorganise our life for more happiness and deeper meaning.

Before I describe further on, in more detail, the different options which this essay will propose, we can summarise the main orientation of the proposed change in mentioning the principal options which constitute the spine of this way of life based on self-limitation:

- Spiritual orientation: change cannot happen for material reasons only, but it has to be guided by spiritual values such as justice, peace, harmony, compassion.
- Self-limitation: we have to learn how to reduce the impact of our way of life by choosing simplicity, by giving priority to human values over material ones. This form of intentional self-restriction is a form of liberation which brings real happiness: *small is beautiful*.
- Local community: we are all parts of a wider common social and natural body and we are all interdependent. Cooperation is the base for a harmonious development. Although competition can be considered as healthy when it remains limited, it is only an illusion, a bet in which each one hopes to be quicker and smarter than the other, but in which there are many more losers than winners. The local community is the place where change can take shape, according to a common project which grows in consensus with time and with the maturity of its members. This project slowly takes shape, even in a kind of marginal way, through the personal action of a few members.
- Cumulative effect: the world is what it is because of the cumulative effect of our respective personal impacts (for each of us negligible) or of our personal renunciations (for each of us a high cost). There are no other actors than people, although certainly some people have more impact than others.
- Whitewashing and corruption: the goods we consume are generally produced in conditions based on the exploitation of the

poorest or of poorer countries and on the destruction of the environment. When these goods are repacked and presented on the shelves of our local supermarket, they have lost all traces of this form of corruption which has generated them. They have been whitewashed as so many disruptive aspects of our modern society have become hidden: this form of virtuality makes truth difficult to grasp.

- A choice is a vote: each choice we make is a vote which encourages the production or the behaviour or the belief which is validated by this choice. We are therefore responsible for each choice because it shapes the world as it is.
- A new anthropology: all these main options constitute the practice of a new anthropology, i.e. a new understanding of the meaning of life, based on the preeminence of human values over material goods. This new anthropology is necessary not because its values are morally superior but because it is a necessary condition for opening us to the experience of the real essence of life instead of keeping us imprisoned in an illusion of material comfort and security which cuts us off from others and from our natural environment.

The power of truth

Gandhi practised his own truth with a very high rigor and freedom. He showed us the way of integrity (the way to remain whole) and how much our own testimony is important to foster the change we want to see in the world. In being faithful to our understanding of life and to our own spiritual path, which is more a search than a ready-made answer, we become really creative and capable of following our own vocation. We have the opportunity of being recognised and appreciated by our own community for what we are. Is that not a more positive way to happiness than conformity with the kind of success which our materialistic society proposes and which is in fact

only a frustrating and disturbing illusion? The practice of the power of truth is certainly the most powerful non-violent way to convince and to change our world for a more human one, as well as to change ourselves in order to discover the depth of life and to find real happiness.

1) TO BE AND TO HAVE

Our western world has clearly established ways to evaluate wealth; we speak about wealthy and struggling people, rich and poor countries as if it were a clear concept. In our modern culture wealth is mainly understood as material well-being. Yet many local communities that live in our western world characterised by its material abundance are suffering of essential lacks for their own happiness: we all yearn for true love, peace, joy and possibilities to express our creativity. We seem to have everything we need, yet life passes by without us knowing what it is truly.

Misery, poverty, sufficiency and accumulation

We live in conditions that can be assessed in an objective way and we should know whether we have enough or not. “*Enough*” is actually a curious measure or concept because it is essentially rooted in our way to perceive the world and our place in it. To better understand the ambivalence of this variable measure let’s just formulate a basic consideration which will be our starting point for the auscultation of our perception of wealth and poverty.

The chain of transformation

The chain of perception (or of transformation) changes facts into perceptions, then into interpretations and choices.

We do not perceive facts as they are, but our senses, our mind, our heart and the many components of our being are continuously processing what happens to us and around us, and what we perceive of it, into a long chain of transformations which assimilate the basic

information in order to make it usable and to help us cope with our environment. The chain transforms facts into perceptions, perceptions into interpretations, and interpretations into choices:

- 1) The facts: they are made out of what happens in us and around us - if they exist independently of us, and that is not even sure that they do.
- 2) The perceptions: they are the sensations which these facts provoke in us, mainly through our senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Our mind is indeed our sixth sense in the way it is assembling these very disparate perceptions provided through our five senses, which are, each of them, very specialised. It is the role of our mind to construct the composed resulting image of these varied inputs in adding the missing data which it gets out of its own storage (memory, acquired concepts, imagination).
- 3) The interpretations: they form the understanding we create for the resulting image provided by our mind, it means that we try to give a meaning to what we have perceived. This interpretation relates of course mainly to our past experiences, our emotions, our knowledge, our passions, our wounds, our memories. This interpretation is a deep transformation of the received messages according to our own personality and attitude.
- 4) The choices: they are the reactions which these interpretations provoke in us and they generate attitudes, behaviours and acts which are very much connected with the meaning of the interpretation. More than the real facts we try to perceive, it is the meaning we give to our perceptions which fosters the kind of reactions we express.

The consecutive reactions according to our choices will generate new facts which will influence our environment and therefore provoke

new perceptions: the chain of transformations is an infinite cycle that never finishes.

This understanding of the way we transform what we call reality, in order to make it our own reality, is very important because it shows how much we change the initial signal, which is the fact, so that we come to an understanding and to a reaction. The transformation appears still deeper when one is aware that many of its parameters are not mastered as some of them are also unconscious.

We believe that our mind is working like a machine, with precision and dependability; yet its functioning as well as the stored material (past experiences and reconfigured memories), which it uses along the chain of transformation I just described, are mainly processed and reoriented by emotional factors and influences of cultural or social values or patterns. This process is probably the stuff of life as we have to process everything that happens to us in order to be able to adapt our behaviours and attitudes to our environment.

In the logic continuation of what I just described, our sense of being rich or poor depends more, it seems, on the context than on our personal daily experience. Do my neighbours seem to have what I do not have and yearn for? What is the pattern of success in my community and how do I perceive its material expressions in outlook? How much do I feel free to resist these social trends and follow my own path, rooted in my own perceptions, interpretations and choices (values)?

Misery, poverty and needs

Misery is a strong lack of essentials (food, shelter, love); poverty is scarcity of means. Both depend on what basic needs are truly.

Misery and poverty are very different from one another:

- Misery ensues from a strong lack of basic means and resources to answer essential needs, like water, food, shelter, health, education, creativity, love, ethical and spiritual values, meaning of life. We often have difficulty to identify immaterial misery while we easily recognise what we think is material misery. Misery can concern some partial aspects of our life: we can be materially wealthy but experience deep misery in our spiritual or cultural life; or the opposite is also possible. Our western culture will more easily identify the latter case than the former and call it globally misery. Yet misery often concerns only some aspects of our life: the beggar girl who has no shelter but welcomes you with a bright smile has a treasure the wealthy sad person does not know.
- Poverty is linked with scarcity more than with a total lack of something. Like misery it concerns usually only some partial aspects of life, although often very essential aspects.

We have to learn how to make a distinction between misery and poverty and see how much misery qualifies also our modern way of life, especially as rich societies: lack of social link, lack of social solidarity, lack of joy in everyday life, state of frequent depression.

Misery and poverty are both narrowly linked with our own perception of what our essential needs are. The definition of needs fluctuates from one person to the next. Some value more material aspects, others more social and cultural aspects, others more ethical or spiritual aspects. Our true needs are usually a combination of these different aspects, yet it depends on us which ones we give priority to. Actually our basic needs can remain very simple, as long we have the

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necessary minimum of food, shelter, clothes, health, education, love and possibilities for expression of our creativity. We do not need much.

Our relationship with nature makes the impact of our needs on our behaviours rather explicit. This can be described in the following way:

- Our society exacerbates any possible need. The meaning of life we have discovered for ourselves is the key that allows us to choose which needs and desires are real for our own life.
- Needs and desires are hard to tell apart, especially in a society which plays with this confusion; we have to learn to see the truth.
- Mainly greed, and also ignorance, are our main trends which push us to escape away from being, into more doing and more having.
- Life is like a movie; the screen is the truly permanent Reality, while the projection never stops changing and creating new illusions.
- As soon survival is ensured, non material goods (love, peace) become more important; they have a lesser environmental impact.
- Services like health and education rely on a combination of material and immaterial goods; the simplest services are the most effective.
- The major illnesses of our time (cancer, Aids, depression, obesity) can also be understood as expressions of our collective lack of awareness for the meaning of our common evolution.

These few assessments show that we need to make a choice and take a stand. Poor people, in this sense, are not always the poorest.

Self-limitation, sufficiency and subsistence

Our social context stimulates our human weaknesses: a feeling of insecurity incites us to accumulate to escape the challenge of life.

In a paradoxical way sufficiency is never enough; we feel we need more; we want to accumulate more and more, in a folly of growth which seems to have no end. Yet resources are limited; inequality in the way wealth is shared shows that this trend towards accumulation goes against harmony and against a sense of justice. We sacrifice thus our ethical values and human priorities for an unconscious sense of personal insecurity and trend for greed.

Indeed, as soon as we have what we need for our material and spiritual survival, we should direct our creative energy towards immaterial values and the well-being of our human or local community and of our natural surroundings or wider community of all sentient beings. This is the law of sufficiency and subsistence which is based on spontaneous self-limitation. When abundance makes unnecessary accumulation possible, it appears to be harmful for the life community.

The pattern of our western development is based on the process of accumulation, much beyond our essential needs. Accumulation allows speculation and profit which allow more accumulation. We have to learn how to practise three different attitudes which are mainly unknown to us and even seem to be negative attitudes, because we have so much identified with the patterns of development of our society:

- 1) Self-limitation: this is our spontaneous capacity to reduce our own standard of life. Small is beautiful. Self-limitation opens the door for a true quality of life. It is not a negative trend; it is our freedom

to concentrate on what is essential. It does less in order to offer more quality. In our society it is considered as a sad restrictive attitude because we became blind how much our happiness does not depend on our material conditions. And, even when we are aware of this truth, we often do not act in conformity with it.

- 2) Sufficiency: this is the capacity to discern when we have enough. This evaluation is of course narrowly linked with the way we evaluate our needs. Our awareness that simplicity facilitates happiness will participate in reducing our needs and will make sufficiency more easily available, each time our needs can be reduced to their possible minimum. Minimal sufficiency does not mean poverty (in the meaning of lack) but expresses on the contrary a capacity for happiness which does not depend on abundance, especially not on material abundance. Sufficiency is freedom.
- 3) Subsistence: this is the attitude and activity that allow each one to get what is needed. It aims at sufficiency. The discernment of sufficiency allows subsistence to be directed towards what is essential in life. When sufficiency is attained, subsistence can concentrate on immaterial goods, like generosity, solidarity, art, celebration. It becomes then free of constraining needs.

Being, doing and having

In our life, being is the most important need, much more essential than doing and having that often become escapes more than needs.

It is very inspiring to make the distinction between these three forms of needs which appear constantly in our daily life:

- 1) Being is the primordial need; it means first surviving, i.e. it needs air, water, food, shelter, health, security, education, recognition,

love. But being is also the core and essence itself of life. Being is the central experience: breathing and being aware of what is.

- 2) Doing is necessary to provide us with what is necessary - and even with more - for our survival, for our deep evolution and for our enjoyment. Yet doing is not the essence of life. It is only a way for providing us with necessary resources, conditions, experiences and opportunities. Doing is a form of teaching: it helps us to be, yet it is not being itself. The real quality of our doing relies in fact on the spirit which animates our action, on our awareness and on the way we interpret our experiences; this awareness and this capacity for interpretation are truly parts of our being.
- 3) Having is the least important of these three dimensions of life, especially when all basic needs are satisfied. Having, in the meaning of an accumulation of goods, is certainly not an essential condition for happiness, especially when it concerns non basic goods, i.e. goods which are not necessary for our survival or for the development of our essential being.

Out of this simplified distinction between being, doing and having, a contrast ensues or more exactly a hierarchy between these three different categories, or levels, of needs. These three categories have simultaneously a material and a non-material reality, in a polarity that illustrates how much we are hanging in the tension and complementarity between spirit and matter.

Love and joy as choices

We have the tendency to wait for love and joy to come into our life and be experienced. Yet love and joy are our own decisions.

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We all dream of the perfect love and of finding happiness in a deep sense of joy. We generally believe that these beautiful qualities are given by external circumstances to the luckiest of us and that they do not depend on our personal attitude. We generally believe that love and joy depend on mainly external factors and that they should be given to us by life in order for us to live fully. We strive therefore to create for ourselves the right conditions which will provide them to us, like intense social relationships and physical well-being in order to find the one who will love us and to create the frame for feeling well.

Yet love and joy do not depend on external circumstances but take their source in our own interior world because they stream out of our own essence and constitute in fact our own choices; they depend on our attitude towards life: do we expect life to provide us with what we want or are we ready to commit ourselves to a positive attitude, as creators of our own lives, when we focus on the mysterious qualities of the precious movement of life which is already given to us in abundance and which consists intrinsically in love and joy? Love arises from our own choice to be source of love and joy also arises from our own choice to be joyful. Love and joy are practices. This statement reveals a deep inversion in our usual attitude and makes the whole difference between a taker and a giver attitude; and it enables harmony to be recognisable in our existence as a quality that is already given, even in an apparently hidden way.

So many people are disappointed or frustrated about their own life because they believe it should be different. Who does not dream of the perfect love and harmony? Yet we have difficulty to be aware how much we create our life through the attitude of expectation we adopt. Love is believed to be a feeling which arises naturally when we meet the perfect match for our life. This false belief creates a huge

obstacle for us to access true love. Love is a decision. One chooses to love what is or whom one meets. Love is not only a decision, but also an effort; it is led by our awareness of the central place love has in life as a leading energy which creates attraction. Love is the source of attraction, and not the contrary, as we believe too often.

Life is based on generosity, on what we give, more than on what we receive. The rich is the one who gives. Therefore love - and joy similarly - are decisions. They are our own choices which will foster our life, instead of us waiting for them to happen to us accidentally.

Material poverty and spiritual wealth

In our search for wealth and truth we have established a scale of measurements of what is wealth. It is meant to help us to fight poverty which should be eradicated from this world. Yet the scale itself is based on the same trends and values which have fostered our world and which guide our form of development which is based on growth and accumulation... and generates poverty.

GDP, HDI and HPI

We have invented scales to measure and compare development in different societies; yet they do not consider what should be grasped.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the sum of all monetary transactions in a country. It is a purely mechanical addition of all the acts on the market of a country: it does not consider the qualitative aspects of these transactions nor the differences in their nature nor what does happen outside the monetary exchanges and has yet an economic value although it is not converted into money. The GDP

per capita is believed to allow a comparison between the different states of wealth in different countries.

The Human Development Index (HDI) tries to correct this false measure by introducing some qualitative factors such as life expectancy and education possibilities. Yet the key of reference remains the pattern of the western development in its quest for accumulation.

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) considers life expectancy, life satisfaction and the ecological footprint. It provides certainly a better picture of happiness. Yet it remains defined by factors which cannot be considered as being universal.

All these classifications show different pictures but yet do not consider the essential. Let see in more detail:

The GDP³, as the sum of all monetary transactions, depends on the price of the object or service which is sold or produced; identical or equivalent activities in different countries have very different respective prices (for instance the repair of shoes in India or in Switzerland) and will influence the GDP in very unequal ways although they have basically same value. The GDP depends also on how much of the total national economic activity goes through money exchange; economic activities such as self-sufficiency, household work and exchanges in reciprocity (without money) are ignored, although their role in traditional societies remains central and their relative importance varies tremendously from one country

³ Gross Domestic Product: GDP = private consumption + gross investment + government spending + (exports - imports). Among the 15 first countries (descending order), we find: Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Qatar, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, USA, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Finland, Belgium, France, Germany. And among the last (descending order): Timor Leste, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Niger, Eritrea, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, Burundi.

to the next. The comparison between countries is subject to the official exchange rate which disadvantages weak currencies (devaluation for instance would modify the terms of the comparison). It does not consider what has no monetary price: solidarity, justice, education, generosity. It does not consider what the market does not consider: the value of free given goods and services, the ecological equilibrium, the limitation of natural resources, the value of human life. It does not consider the usefulness and morality of what is produced: bread, education, profit from speculation and weapons are considered alike. For instance the deliberate choice for a more simple way of life (choice for self-sufficiency or an ecological way of life, life as an hermit or a monk) appears here as a lack although it is motivated by a higher form of personal maturity. The GDP does not consider either how money is earned: obscene profits and hard daily work are considered in the same way. How could such a falsified indicator not lead us astray as it is based on the same destructive trends which have led to the present inequality and non-sustainability of the international economic system?

The HDI⁴ shows a consistent progress on GDP, because it tries to include more human factors such as health and education but it remains yet basically defined by the GDP and refers to western models.

The HPI⁵ is based on three factors: life expectancy, life satisfaction and ecological footprint. Countries from Central or South America

⁴ Human Development Index: the HDI is based on the four following factors; GDP, life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling. The GDP is taken from the GDP classification, life expectancy and years of schooling come out of statistics. Among the 15 first countries we find (descending order): Norway, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Japan, Korea, Switzerland, France, Israel. The list is not very different from the GDP's one.

⁵ Happy Planet Index: life expectancy is the same as for HDI; life satisfaction answers the question: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" (on a scale 1 to 10);

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are thus in better position as life satisfaction is there relatively high with a relatively low ecological footprint. It shows that life satisfaction is in general higher for people between 10 and 50 years old with an income between 10 and 20'000 US\$ a year, while life satisfaction in rich countries is best for people above 60 with a yearly income above 30'000 US\$. We can see that the introduction of the happiness' factor changes completely the classification. It could provide by itself a classification as such.

Other criteria, other results. Each one of these classification is based on the ignorance of so many aspects which are in fact essential to understand what makes wealth and poverty. For instance quality labels like labels concerning fair trade, environment maintenance, child work, animal welfare, bio food, do not influence these indexes, which ignore what is quality. Or another example; poor countries are usually young countries; 48% of the population in Ivory Coast are younger than 14, while only 17% in Sweden. It represents evidently an incredible potential for life our rich societies have lost.

The main trouble in our development is that it is guided by false premises about endless growth in a finite environment, about purely material aspirations, without integrating any human or ethical aspect concerning the sense of justice and the meaning of such an extreme quest for material wealth. This exacerbated form of development cannot be challenged as long as we do not accept to question these basic fundamentals of its stability. To do so, we need to be free enough

to dare to question what seems to make our own wealth. In fact we will see in this book that these apparent means for wealth are more destructive than anything else.

As this kind of considerations is well known, I won't develop them more.

Exploitation, colonisation and depreciation

Because they ignore qualitative aspects, our patterns of development create poverty by destroying sustainable ways of life.

Our patterns of development, that are meant in principle to guide our action in order to make access to wealth and well-being possible for all, foster yet poverty, especially when they are actualised outside our western society:

- 1) Exploitation: they are generating excessive ways of extracting natural resources, generally in the hands of a privileged minority, and create shortage by depriving local communities of they own resources.
- 2) Colonisation: they are encouraging the predominance of new goods and services over values which local communities used to recognise traditionally and they are creating in this way an artificial shortage by imposing new aims and purposes which are not relevant for or not related to the local needs or means.
- 3) Depreciation: by imposing these other customs and means they are denigrating and making obsolete main traditional social and cultural aspects as well as the know-how of the local community which were grounded on traditional evolution and allowed people to get their regular subsistence.

ecological footprint is in ha/capita; the three factors are corrected by coefficients in order to equalise their relative impact on the classification. Among the 10 first countries, we find (descending order): Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Guatemala, Vietnam, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Brazil, Honduras. The first European country (Netherlands) is on the 43rd position. The USA come on position 114. Last countries in the classification remain mainly African countries as according to GDP or HDI classifications (descending order): Niger, Angola, Estonia, Mali, Mozambique, Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe.

Shortage arises as much out of what has been taken away (exploitation) as of what has been imposed (colonisation) or of what has been negated (depreciation). This form of domination happens as much in Southern countries under the impact of western corporations as it happens also inside our western societies when urbanisation touches traditional local communities or social minorities, by generating marginalisation and social exclusion. Poverty and misery happen thus inside our rich societies. It makes poverty and misery still more shocking when they take place in a generally wealthy context.

Poverty of the wealthy

In our rich communities terrible misery (isolation, destitution) can be found which contrasts very much with the available means.

Marginalisation, isolation and loneliness are certainly the key facts of the misery in our rich societies. Older people, foreigners, refugees, social minorities suffer usually of exclusion or marginalisation which lead quickly to destitution (homelessness, violence, alcohol, drugs, gangs).

Technical means have the tendency to replace human contact: at the supermarket, one can go shopping without saying a word; internet and IT technologies allow people to sit in a virtual world which exists only in their head.

Ignorance and illusion constitute another category of miseries of our western world inasmuch as our powerful material and technical means make us believe in an unlimited power we would have for conquering the world and becoming the teachers of development for

all. Actually the power of our material means outgrew widely our wisdom.

First about isolation: in poor countries people bargain because they have more time than money; it creates and stimulates social links. In rich countries we are used to save time, but are no more available for truly necessary help or human relationships: indifference becomes the key feeling. Who is rich?

In traditional societies, all social categories, from children to elderly, from workers to house bound, from healthy to mentally handicapped people, are more or less integrated into the normal network of relationships inside the community. People who present a difference are not so quickly identified by their difference or handicap. On the opposite, in so-called developed societies, ill, poor, marginal or needy people are defined by what makes them different from “normal” people; their handicap becomes their identity, beyond their own humanity which is forgotten. And usually a specialised institution takes care of them, where professionals are paid to provide the necessary care that the traditional social network used to offer in the past. Each needy person is thus identified by their handicap as unemployed, old, mentally maladjusted, refugee, and gets therefore the right to be assisted in a form of dependency which often confirms and reinforces the handicap.

Institutions are specialised: the school for children, the hospital for health, the refugee centre for foreigners, the old age house for elder people, the asylum for mentally ill, the social services for marginalized. Each social category of age or of disability is taken charge of by a specialised institution. As the whole society tends to be divided in categories (boxes), the social network loses bit by bit its ability to integrate and educate people, and to care for them in a way

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that used to express the natural interdependency which characterises any community.

As Ivan Illich has shown, the more an institution is confronted to the limits of the quality of care by professionals in an artificial frame, the more it obtains complementary subsidies to allow more performance and growth, although the lack of performance is not linked with the lack of means but with the inadequacy of this form of services. The problem resides essentially in the way institutions ignore how to relate to the social network and its capacity to naturally answer human needs. The technical performance of such a system is rarely at stake; the system reveals itself ill-adapted. This does not mean of course that any institution like the hospital is not necessary - its necessity remains evident - but this underlines the way its role is not understood in its relation with the vitality and potential of the community, inasmuch as it deprives the social network from its role. The institutionalisation of care becomes thus a cause of impoverishment and isolation, despite the wealthy means which are generously invested and the high motivation of carers.

And secondly about illusions and representations: in our wealthy societies, poor people are increasingly perceived as a danger for stability and security. Poor suburbs are under surveillance and people are imprisoned for the simple reason that they are homeless or unemployed. Social protest or turmoil is often understood as delinquency more than as a human right to defend one's own dignity.

Representations of whom the other is are usually very poor in our western societies: what do average people know in the USA of how people live in the Middle east, in Africa or in Asia. There is such a deep ignorance of differences and a lack of respect of other cultures. Western governments defend their own interests with very powerful

political, economic or technical means, yet the poverty of the representations and understandings of their leaders generates catastrophic interventions like in Iraq, Afghanistan and in many other cases. It reveals how much our material means grew far beyond what we are intellectually, ethically and spiritually capable to master. Our material wealth outgrows largely our spiritual maturity and makes the poverty of our representations more striking. By contrast, colonised people know usually their own language as well as the one of the dominant power; they know their own traditional ways as well as the ways of modern civilisation. They learn how to play with these different means, despite - or because of - their disempowerment.

Wealth of the poor

In poor communities many treasures of relationships and solidarity, expressions of unknown joy and exuberance can be found.

In poor communities that do not have access to some basic commodities like water, shelter, health, security, education, people can be very lively and help each other or share the minimum they have. In average, and without idealising, simplicity makes poor people certainly more gifted for human faculties such as generosity, hospitality or expressions of joy, than rich people are. The focus of their life is different, despite - or maybe because of - the necessary constant struggle for surviving, which keeps them aware how much they depend on each other.

Wealth: some have it in the hands; others have it in the heart. Constant struggle keeps people alive and their humanity is often stimulated by the lack of what is necessary. In war times people have little disposition to fall into depression.

I remember the smile of a beggar girl in Delhi; it was one of the most touching thing I ever saw; I had not given her anything, I just looked at her, acknowledging her presence and she returned me the most beautiful smile and waved to me when I went away under the bliss of this incredible revelation: it was just pure disinterested and lively humanity. In contrast, the sadness of people one meets in the underground in London or Paris is revealing a deep state of general depression.

Certainly in slums the most horrible oppression can also take place: oppression of the poorest by the poor, extreme violence, inhibited crime, excruciating prostitution. Yet in this form of hell humanity prevails. Music, dance and joy are the expressions of an inextinguishable thirst for life and an incredible availability to help each other. When help is needed, the one who can provide does not say he has no time but remains there for the needy, as long as necessary.

Our fundamental needs are only satisfied by what one can summarise with the word *humanity*.

True wealth

Beyond water, food and shelter, the true riches of life are yet health, security, peace, trust, solidarity, knowledge, wisdom, love.

Democracy means that one knows, when someone rings the bell at 6 am, it is the milkman, used to say Churchill. True well-being can only be provided by the whole of the community. We are all interdependent. And even if our physical being needs a few basic material goods for surviving, our main needs remain connected with

immaterial aspects of our person, especially our need for love and recognition, which, once again, means social links.

There is an infinite quantity of riches of different significations:

- Health is physical as much as mental or spiritual: it is the harmonious way to be in relationship with one's body, mind and spirit. Basic means allow basic health. Only a minority of illnesses need extreme treatments.
- The 3 know-how: know how to be, know how to do and know how to live. Education is not only what one learns at school; it is before all what one learns in one's social milieu; this is certainly the best form of schooling; one watches how Dad repairs the fence, how Mum bakes the bread, how the farmer ploughs the field, how the carpenter builds the house, how adults solve their problems and conflicts. Of course it can only happen in a healthy well integrated community.
- Peace, silence, time, space are the great luxuries of our time of overpopulated places.
- Wisdom and search for the meaning of life: it is precious to be able to wonder and to be free to question any aspect of our own life. Our own privileges are often the strongest wards of the cell we imprison ourselves into.
- Peace is more than the absence of conflicts; it is an expression of justice and of harmony inside the community in what concerns the image of future. Peace ensues out of inner serenity, out of trust in the existing harmony the world and society provide; it takes shape through cooperation and not competition. It is the opposite of fear, which is the opposite of love. Our governments today try to foster fear as a means to control people in the short term. More than the real causes of conflicts, this tendency to spread fear creates a huge obstacle to peace and harmony.

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- Love is certainly the main energy in life. We all strive to it until we experience it. It can be hidden in a neighbour or a teacher, when one does not find it in one's own family. Love is also a choice and a form of learning in our attitude to the world. Love is complex and expresses itself in three main ways: 1) *Eros* (desire, passion) is the original energy of our longing and desire for life. It is physical, but also sentimental and passionate. Although it is centred on ourselves and principally egocentric, it leads us to deeper discoveries and to a wider understanding, when we become more mature. 2) *Philia* (friendship) is a selective love which chooses who has to be loved: our friends, the ones who are similar to us, the ones we feel comfortable with. Selection can allow great generosity and deep communication, yet it limits our true opening to the diversity of all beings. 3) *Agape* (father love, divine love) embraces without choosing, like the rain which "falls on good and evil people". It is in general the way we love our children. This form of love gives without expectation for any return. There are no more friends or enemies. This form of love has the power to change the heart of people. We can experience it only when we practise it. There is an evident gradation from the first form of love (*Eros*) to the third (*Agape*), yet the first and second remain present in the third which constitutes their accomplishment. True love is the experience of the unity of the universe as one body which we belong to.
- Justice is the harmony in the law of the chain of causes and consequences. It shows how truth generates life while cheating generates suffering. Justice is not about punishment but about truth: to accept to see what is and how it ensues from what has been done. It is also the art to adapt to the laws of nature and of respect. Justice is the reign of truth and transparency; it is the light which makes shadows visible. Under this light, violence, ugliness, suffering, ignorance reveal our incapacity or more exactly our

refusal to accept the laws of nature, and to respect and adapt to them: it reveals our resistance to resign from destroying, from exploiting and from being violent. Mankind has invented a wide system of regulations which tries principally to maintain our dominance over nature and over the weakest by restraining our most extreme trends for greed and violence when they become too destructive. It is based on punishment (such as fines, imprisonment) which prevents the chain of causes and consequences to reveal the truth. Of course we need a form of protection against destructive behaviours, but this must be done in harmony with the laws of nature: human justice should in priority prevent any behaviour which leads to destruction, exploitation or violence. Life is sacred and nature is our teacher how to adapt to it; all beings are equal.

- Hope is the faculty to discern the potential of life and to experience deep joy when we observe the nature of the present situation, and we believe it will take shape in a fruitful way. This positive glance on the surroundings changes the potentiality by activating what brings life. It is mainly a loving faculty to see beyond the first appearances.

The 4 miseries of our world

As for the chain of transformation, our misery arises from the facts, from our perceptions, from our interpretations or from our choices.

We can distinguish four different forms of misery:

- 1) Material misery: our suffering in the facts,
- 2) Affective misery: our suffering in our perceptions,
- 3) Ethical misery: our suffering in our interpretations,
- 4) Spiritual misery: our suffering in our choices.

Let's examine in more detail these four different forms one after the other.

Material misery in the facts

Solving material misery (facts of extreme lack of basic goods and services) is the first key for solving all other forms of misery.

There cannot be any human dignity without satisfaction of the most material basic needs: water, food, shelter, warmth, security, health. This basic material security is the first key for all other forms of misery. On the other hand there cannot be any integrity of the person without the satisfaction of all basic needs that include also non-material needs such as the emotional, psychological, intellectual, spiritual basic needs.

Material misery is the first cause for exploitation and violence; and misery calls for more misery. With an empty stomach or in situations of physical or psychological insecurity, the body uses all the energy it has to solve these first issues. There cannot be any improvement of life conditions as long as the basic needs are not answered.

It is difficult to speak about misery when one does not live in such conditions or at least has not experienced it for a longer duration of time. One cannot speak for others.

Material misery remains often hidden to us, sometimes even in our own neighbourhood. Our lack of awareness is often at the measure of our own ignorance or lack of will to recognise our privileges or lack of freedom to question our own way of life. Material misery of others is not the consequence of a lack of means to remedy it but mainly of

our own collective indifference, as well established nations or social classes, to feel concerned by the misery of others.

Material misery is not always due to an objective state of penury; it can well develop because of false representations in our minds when we strive for unnecessary goods; our desires create an artificial penury by the simple fact we strive to get what is not available or even necessary. The solution in this case relies more on the change of our desires than on the nature of the penury itself.

Affective misery in our perceptions

Affective misery (perception of the world) depends on our past experience, culture, heritage, privileges, beliefs, maturity, freedom.

Our perception of the facts around us and of our own experiences is fostered mainly by the nature of our past experiences which include also the many aspects of our culture, our learning, and all aspects of our own evolution. If our first contact with water has been hurtful, we remember water as dangerous; if it has been refreshing, we remember it as pleasurable; hence we adopt a positive attitude to water. The same happens with any new experience that will be perceived according to the filter of the past ones, as well as through the filter of our own culture, learning and beliefs.

When we lack to identify what we see for what it is (such as acts generated by a lack of love, or by suffering or by violence), we falsify the facts and transform them in order to adapt them to our own inner world: sometimes for reasons of egocentric comfort, but very often simply by ignorance or lack of true understanding, or because our fragile being needs to protect itself from the kind of suffering that the present experience re-awakes, in connection with past

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experiences that may have been hurtful. It remains always difficult for us to identify what we do not know (lack of experience, ignorance) and to discern how much and what our system of self-defence does not want to recognise.

On top of these mechanisms of self-protection, it is evident that our culture is not neutral; it is an explanation of the world which suits our situation and tries to transform our perceptions into something that should confirm our status and the way of life and values which our society has adopted.

We can in fact distinguish five forms of transformation of our perceptions. Our perceptions of the world and of our relationship with the world are falsified by the influence of factors one can usually relate to past experiences:

- 1) Ignorance: if I am not aware or have not experienced something similar to what I discover in the present experience, I am thus unable to identify what it is: the first time I see snow or the ocean, it cannot be compared with anything I know, but only with something which is very different and hardly related to it. More experience in an open mind-set and the freedom to discover new conditions of life can help reduce this form of ignorance.
- 2) Filters of suffering: if I did not experience love in my childhood, I shall strive for it all my life long, until I find it. Or if I experienced violence as a natural way to relate to each other, I shall later reproduce this type of relationship because I know no other. Lack of love or acceptance of violence creates a mind-set which is difficult to escape. It twists my perceptions because I see everything that happens to me through this filter of a search for love or in relation with violence.
- 3) Self-protection: because the past experiences, that the present experience re-awakes, were negative, my whole being tries to protect itself from a repetition. To do so, I try to modify the nature of the facts I perceive in order to make it acceptable. For instance the context or the other may be perceived as responsible or dangerous, although they have nothing to do with my negative past experiences and do not intend to do me any harm: they offer me to swim with them but they ignore that I fear water. The perception will load the fact with negative appreciation and thus twist its nature, generating as such all possible signs of warning.
- 4) Culture provides often a ready-made explanation of our conditions of life according to the past experiences of our ancestors and of the local community. This interpretation generates a favourable choice for what brings privileges and an aversion for what disturbs comfort. I may accept these ready-made interpretations and filter the present experience according to what culture dictates, or I may question these explanations and stick to my own perception, based on my own experience and sensitivity. Culture may propose rich understandings one could not access by oneself, or it can be a shortcut that deprives the facts from the most important and lively part of their content. Only one's own discernment can help to find the answer and choose which stand to adopt.
- 5) Privileges and comfort, like self-protection, will transform the perception into something which will protect one's interests. Yet it is very different from self-protection, because it does not try to protect from a form of suffering which is ingrained in one's own life but it creates a sort of lie in order to avoid challenge. It is like enclosing oneself into a cocoon, excluding in this way any perception which could disturb the stability and comfort of the present situation. This attitude is essentially based on denial.

When perceptions are twisted by one of these five processes of transformation, we become unable or we refuse to see what is or to hear what is told to us. Every time our perception is falsified, we lose the track of real life and we create a virtual reality. This is the misery of our perceptions; this can only be avoided by a sharp insight and a free mind that is trained to see reality as it is: with a thirst for justice as transparency, i.e. a thirst to perceive the chain of causes and consequences as it is in its original nature.

Ethical misery in our interpretations

Ethical misery (inability to interpret rightly and freely our perceptions) prevents us from understanding what is really happening.

As the perception is only raw information we have captured, it needs still to be understood, i.e. to be interpreted. We have to give it a meaning, to understand what it reveals to us. The interpretation of our perceptions is thus, for the signs we have identified, a fundamental transformation into reliable information we can use. This form of understanding depends of course on our level of instruction, on our sensitiveness, on our maturity, on our freedom of mind and on our awareness.

The evaluation of our perceptions marks an important step in our relationship with the world because it requires from us to take an ethical stand. While the transformation of facts into perceptions happens most of the time without us being conscious of the degree of transformation it implies, the transformation of these perceptions into an understanding and an interpretation becomes a conscious act of creation – or at least should be a conscious act. Any interpretation happens in two stages which are usually mixed one with another:

- 1) Understanding: firstly it consists of the observation of the nature of facts and processes which provides the best possible understanding of the facts by relating them with other aspects which are known or perceived by the observer.
- 2) Evaluation: secondly it involves our judgement, our capacity to relate our understanding with our ethical values and with the acceptance we have of truth, when we evaluate our perceptions by using our grid of ethical values.

Our ethical misery becomes evident every time we reveal unable to understand what truly happens. Most of the time we are prevented from interpreting truly and freely what happens, because we are too much absorbed in details, or in our egocentric perception of life, or because we refuse to see how our privileges are under threat if we accept to see the truth.

There are two well-known syndromes that play here a role:

- 1) first the syndrome of the boiled frog: a frog in an pot of water that heats up slowly will die, instead of jumping out, by incapacity of discerning the threshold of danger;
- 2) second the syndrome of the sheep under common harm: when all the sheep of the flock suffer under a common harm, no one reacts, by incapacity of seeing how harm can be avoided;

These two syndromes are good illustrations of the misery of our interpretations; they show how we are unable to react to degrading processes, by lack of awareness of what is involved. Most decisions of our institutions and leaders concern minor aspects of life; we get caught into procedures; we spend millions on building highways but we do not make a few thousands available to reflect about the relevance and significance of this form of development in a context of climate change and peak oil.

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Discernment can only take place in a frame of reference to ethical values. Discernment is about truth and the six questions which I call “the six questions of the Tibetan monk”:

- 1) Authenticity: is it true?
- 2) Evolution: is it good?
- 3) Adequacy: is it right?
- 4) Harmony: is it beautiful?
- 5) Need: is it necessary?
- 6) Purpose: is it a help towards human and spiritual progress?

It requires a high degree of freedom to be able to answer these questions without letting our interests or habits or ways of thinking twist our interpretations. Freedom of mind allows a true freedom of spirit and a sharp ability to search for truth.

Spiritual misery in our choices

Spiritual misery (incapacity to make right and independent choices) prevents us from changing our ways of life and practising truth.

Once we have perceived the facts and interpreted them, we need to decide how to react to what has been understood and evaluated according to our own ethical values. Our interpretations call for choices. The interpretation is already a personal stand by the way it evaluates the perceptions, yet, if it does not come to indifferent conclusions, the interpretation implies further personal commitment, for instance in further research or reflection, in a change of attitude or in action.

Without this further step there would be only conformity to the existing social pressures or consolidation of the status quo. Our choices are about channelling our life energy into our own path and vocation. It requires independence, energy, imagination and courage. The general lack of these four qualities in our daily life, because of our slowness, laziness or fatigue, explains the misery of our choices. A wider spiritual perspective is necessary to allow clearer choices as we have to take a stand in conformity to what we believe; our own vision of the world is acting like a pattern that should lead us but may also keep us in the prison of our narrow representations.

- 1) Independence: I have already repeated many times how our detachment from our privileges and interests is the first condition to allow us to see reality as it is and to recognise the true nature of the situation, even when it goes against our own interests or privileges.
- 2) Energy channelling: our life is the expression of the way we direct our vital and creative energy. It is our role to channel these forces in the right direction, according to our interpretations and our vocation.
- 3) Imagination: it requires imagination to see how this energy can be best used and on what it must be focused. Imagination is the power to go out of conventional behaviours and to invent new ways. Like hope, it is the potential to discern what is not completely expressed and actualised. Imagination makes us free from conventional wisdom, from narrow ways of thinking and takes the risk to experiment new ways.
- 4) Courage is an important dimension of our choices, because the process of choice is inevitably a solitary path. One has to dare to be alone on the path one has chosen. Courage to take a stand requires the daring force of confronting conformity, establishment and any interests which are challenged by truth. Trust in one's

own intuition is an important factor, because the loneliness of choice makes us uncertain of our strength and righteousness. Trust roots in faith.

Another essential dimension of choice is perspective. In our society we have the tendency to react to events instead of foreseeing them and taking measures in advance. We invest more effort in rescuing people from a mud slide than in reforestation of threaten areas. In order to foresee what can or will happen, we need perspective. And perspective ensues out of the qualities I have just mentioned: out of true interpretation and out of effective independence, right energy channelling, creative imagination and trustful courage. And when one has perspective, one has to act, without facts confirming the adequacy of the action; the action will be valued only by the fact that the threat does not become reality; facts work then against one's perspective; they do not justify the efforts made and the measures taken, each time the threat has been avoided. Yet perspective is generally positive and creative; perspective can not only avoid threats but it can also create opportunities; when one creates creative local jobs for young people, one sees them thriving.

The true source of our faculty for perspective is the wider spiritual frame we have adopted and that constitutes the general reference for our understanding of the world. Perspective is nourished by our wider representation of the meaning and sacred dimension of life. Whatever we have adopted as a wider understanding of the world - whether religious or humanist or materialist or atheist - it offers a spiritual explanation of how the world evolves and how life is meant to be. The universe develops according to a given order and every tradition, or even anti-conformism, has its own representation of what this material and sacred dimension is and how it acts. Of course this is here only a short mention of something that remains very mysterious,

much beyond what we can afford to describe. The best way to evoke it remains the apophatic path, i.e. the way not to describe it, as it has been explained in the introduction. Although it remains mysterious and not well defined, this wider spiritual frame of reference constitutes the principal root of our understanding of life. It is acting when we try to interpret our perceptions; it is still more influential when we make choices. This wider spiritual frame is actually the global perspective we lack too often. Because it is untold and mysterious we often do not dare to make it our principal tool for decision. Yet it seems to be the most trustworthy reference because it is the widest and thus the most integrating explanation. In fact it is where our existential freedom is deeply rooted. It is the source of our true life. On the opposite, the lack of influence of this wider spiritual frame in our lives makes our experience much poorer and reveals the misery of our choices.

In a narrow dialogue with this wider perspective the vision we have for our own life takes shape. This vision is different from the wider perspective inasmuch as it describes more precisely the way we choose to act and the way we believe the world should be, with more justice, with a deeper sense of community, with more tolerance and more love. This personal vision acts like a model or a project we wish to actualise. It is a stimulating guide and yet also a form of imprisonment as any representation tends to trap us, to catch us in a rigid frame. There is a kind of positive tension between what we observe in the world around us and this positive vision of what should be. The contrast generates a form of anger which acts positively as it challenges us to act for a better world. Yet it should remain flexible enough and we have to adapt continuously this vision to our new experiences and to what the world offers. This vision remains alive when it is maintained in the tension between our acceptance of what is and our desire to change our surroundings for

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more justice and love. This dynamic shakes the spiritual misery of our choices and allows us to remain free from what prevents us to be alive.

The privilege of poverty

St Clare and Francis of Assisi had chosen to be poor because it was for them the only way to follow their path of spiritual freedom.

St Clare has asked many times the successive popes to recognise officially what she used to call “the privilege of poverty” for her monastic order. This privilege meant that the monastery was allowed not to own anything (no building, no fields, no personal items); this choice was in complete contradiction with the custom according to which each monastery had to own their own wealth which constituted the stable source of their daily subsistence. The successive popes have been very reluctant to attribute St Clare this privilege but she nevertheless obtained from each of them that they accepted to confer it to her. This persistence shows how much there can be a voluntary and very clear choice for poverty, as a positive and creative way of life that allows spiritual freedom, in a deeper relationship with the sacred dimension of life. Many monastic orders follow a rule which includes the choice of poverty. Sannyasi in India (beggar monks) live according to this same principle of life. Mennonites or even hippies do or did in a past time. Many people today are not attracted by material wealth but have chosen to live a simple life in harmony with nature or among the poorest. Some traditional cultures (Amerindian, Aboriginal) are even based on this principle; they refuse excessive material development in order to remain in harmony with their surroundings.

St Francis and St Clare were radical people; they believed in the Providence who provides us with what we need every day. It does not mean comfort but it means certainly a quality of life that is unknown to people who live in comfort. Life and material well-being seem to exclude one another, not because wealth is bad - it is just neutral and depends on what one does out of it - but because we seem unable to have it and to remain free.

The freedom of spirit

Our true capacity to embrace life depends on our detachment from comfort and on our capacity to challenge our representations.

Our position in our society, our culture, our privileges, our habits and our representations are constantly discouraging us from questioning our way of life, our way of thinking and our representations of what life is or should be. If we want to be really free, we have to accept to take the risk to question also what constitutes the foundation of our privileges and interests. It is not only about examining whether our wealth is truly merited and not acquired through devious means, but it is also about questioning our way of understanding the world. To be truly free, we need to question also what we feel is common sense, what we feel is the evident basic condition of our material survival. Freedom is not a hazardous way of choosing between many equal possibilities; it is the liberty of spirit to find truth whatever truth is. Authentic freedom cannot be anything else than the search for truth. It means that to be free we need to be truthful and to live according to the deepest meaning of what we have discovered about truth.

Our society is mainly organised around its own understanding of what subsistence is, which, in our modern wealthy society, has developed so much that it goes much beyond what is basically

necessary for our material, affective, intellectual and spiritual surviving. This form of excessive abundance has generated a general frame for our philosophical understanding of the world we live in and for the way we imagine we have to live. In order to examine the true nature of our civilisation, we have to undergo a real psychotherapy through which we will be trying to uncover what is unconsciously accepted as an unquestionable basic statement of evidence, whether it is true or not. We have to dare to question what the meaning of work, of property, of money, of market, of investment, of profit, of speculation is, and of many other aspects of our economic and philosophic system and what they represent truly for us in our daily life. Starting in this way to question most practical aspects of our daily life, we should then extend our quest to the more immaterial questions of our intellectual and spiritual life, because these very personal dimensions of our own maturity have to escape the conformism of conventional wisdom to become truly ours.

Without the freedom to investigate clearly the true nature of all these components, we cannot see the truth and we cannot be sure we are free. This investigation requires courage and openness of mind; it requires before all the freedom to dare to challenge what constitutes the justification of our comfort. It means also that we will be ready to accept the conclusions of this examination however shocking they can be for us in their new revelation and that we will be capable to change our ways of living and thinking according to what we will discover.

Freedom is not the opportunity to choose whatever pleases us; it is not throwing the dices to take one or the other option among many of equal values. Freedom is exclusively the single path towards truth. Without truth there is no freedom. As Paul Evdokimov⁶ puts it,

freedom is the way (the “how”) and truth is the content (the “what”). In fact there is no choice in freedom but the only option of conforming to truth. This acceptance is the only condition for generating true freedom of spirit.

This is in an attempt to practise this radical spirit of freedom that we will try now to investigate the true nature of most components of our economic activities and question the ideas we have accumulated about them. We will do so in the next chapter in which we will examine the different components of our economic system in a way that can seem iconoclast. I ask the reader for tolerance and for the acceptance to be led on this challenging path with an open mind and spirit, because it is the path for freedom.

⁶ Paul Evdokimov: *Orthodoxy*. New City Press, 2011.

2) THE BRICKS OF ECONOMY

In order to challenge and transform our representations, I will now describe the main components of economy under a special approach which will go mainly against official doctrine because it will be based not on social conventions but on the observation of the laws of nature, which are aiming at satisfying basic needs; these laws of nature show how much our social patterns of behaviour distort life because they are generally aiming at satisfying accumulation and growth beyond necessity.

We can distinguish two principal categories of economic components: the ones which are related with work and the ones which are related with ownership.

Work as creativity

As our modern economic system is based on what they call production, growth and wealth creation, let's start from the following first assessment that invalidates the concept of production.

The illusion of wealth creation

Industrial society pretends to create wealth; production is in fact an illusion because it consists only in transformation of what is given.

The myth of industrial society consists in growth and wealth creation; it is what we call production. Yet it is impossible to create goods out of nothing. Energy and matter cannot be created; they can only be transformed. Energy has even a tendency to entropy, i.e. to

dissolution. The creation of wealth is therefore impossible despite the apparition of new forms (appearances) through transformation which makes believe that something new has been produced. It is in fact only a new form that has appeared. Creativity can only concern the way of transformation (the new form) and not the production itself (creation out of nothing). Wealth, or goods, because it cannot be created, cannot appear out of nothing. It can only be transformed or transferred or taken away from where it is available in nature. What is meant by "wealth creation" does not emphasise the process of transformation, into new forms, of what already exists, but focusses mainly on the visible signs resulting out of the process, called "products", which are principally made visible through simple accumulation, combination and addition of existing components. The illusion of production is only possible because it switches from the process - that is real - to the "product" - that is only an intermediary stage in the process of transformation and recycling.

"Nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything is transforming" as Anaxagoras of Clazomenae put it. Matter and energy are continuously transformed into other forms of matter and energy. The form changes, and creativity is an important part of this transformation process, but the content remains, as the same quantum of energy and matter in their different expressions.

The quantity of available materials and energy in the universe is constant. Water is transformed into steam or ice when energy is added or liberated. Photosynthesis transforms gas and water into plants. Combustion liberates energy while it transforms plants back into gas and water. Such processes of transformation generate new forms and new appearances but the total amount of matter and energy remains globally constant.

What is true about energy and matter is also true for wealth; it cannot be created; it can only be transformed. Wealth, which should be called “resources”, can remain at a raw state in nature or can be transformed or distributed equally between users or on the contrary concentrate in the hands of a few after being transformed. Concentration of wealth can only result out of a simple transfer from one person to another. Accumulation can only be made possible where there is profit, it means unbalanced exchanges between a loser and a winner.

The available materials or produces from nature that we are used to take in the environment constitute the common wealth, and should be shared equally at the rhythm at which they are reconstituted by nature. Production is an illusion which our industrial society has shaped. It is time for us to awake and to recognise that this illusion has destroyed our environment as well as the spirit of our society. On the opposite, the concept of transformation has a very different meaning which will change our relationship with nature and the quality of what we want to get out of this transformation: it emphasises how much the available quantity remains always the same and has thus to be managed wisely and used for the right purpose.

If we speak of transformation instead of production, our way of considering nature changes completely. We start then to better understand how much our activities have to integrate into the natural cycles which are given and are the laws of nature. We are no more the dominant power but we have to adapt to rhythms which are defined by nature – and not by us - and cannot be changed unless we accept to destroy the context that nourishes us. Speaking of transformation emphasises the fact that everything is ever changing and flowing. Life is the large stream of constant transformation;

nothing remains stable; everything is changing according to successive cycles of birth and death. Nothing is permanent. As human beings we are also undergoing this kind of permanent transformation, whether we accept it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we accompany this process or resist it.

What we call production is in fact our creativity inasmuch as we have learned to recombine more or less basic given elements in different ways. Transformation needs creativity, especially if it is aimed at a better use of what is transformed.

Gratuity of resources

All resources are free of charge: life, air, sunshine, water, food, love, education... except for the work necessary for providing them.

In nature every resource is free: life is given at birth; air is freely available as well as water or sunshine which constitute the basic necessary resources for life. Similarly families feed their children free of charge. Food grows thanks to the energy of the sun and the minerals contained in the soil. Our work is only an accessory helper, especially necessary to yield the products and make them available to others through transformation, transport or distribution. Similarly in what concerns immaterial aspects of life: families educate their children also free of charge; children learn to walk and speak, and they acquire freely the necessary skills for life, for communication and integration into a social network. Our society too provides schools and social services free of charge. When we realise that most natural and social resources are freely given, it changes completely our view of life and of social and economic exchanges. Unlike resources, work, as we will see later, is a component of a different kind which is only partly necessary for transformation.

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This statement about the gratuity of most resources will seem extreme to many readers because we are used to believe that everything costs money and that our work is absolutely necessary for the transformation of natural forces into products that answer our basic needs. Yet, when one observes the nature of resources and of the way they become accessible, it becomes evident that they are mainly made available by nature itself and that our work is only an accessory help and not the main provider. Seeds, soil, water, sunshine are the main energies which transform apparently inert components into food. Our work consists then in yielding the results of these processes of transformation and in transporting them where they are needed or in limiting the impact of negative processes (weeds, parasites, illnesses, drought) in order to facilitate the natural growth of what we need.

This is not only true for food; it is also relevant for mineral resources, for wood, for energy itself which is also freely given and still needs to be captured.

This is also true for social resources such as knowledge: our main skills such as walking, speaking, learning, thinking, choosing, loving, are learnt and developed in our families or at school. There has always been a natural tendency of any society to share its knowledge with the younger generation. Which parents do not teach their children to integrate into society and to develop their own skills? When there is a lack in education, it is usually due to dysfunctioning families or communities or to ignorance, and not because skills are for sale and need to be paid for.

Of course this basic statement about the gratuity of natural and social resources must be corrected by the fact that resources are often

combined with work because they need often the accessory contribution of work to be made available, and work, although accessory, costs. Then resources, when they become available, have lost their original character of their gratuity: food costs in the shops, water costs at the tap, education costs in schools and universities (although paid by public subsidies provided by taxes). Yet it is important to see that resources cost only because of this necessary component of work, despite the fact they are indeed free of charge when provided by nature.

Work as creative transformation

Work is our best form of creativity, expressed in the way we adapt to our environment; being and creativity are freely given to us.

Although work costs - and we will soon see why it costs - its main energy, which is creativity, is, also like other resources, provided free of charge to us. Actually creativity is at the core of our own being, and our being is given freely to us as energy of life. Creativity is our main energy for fostering the adequate ways to adapt to our environment or to adapt our surroundings to our needs. It includes the basic force of life and combines it with skills, memory, knowledge, courage, imagination. In an ideal way creativity and work should mean the same: our faculty and personal expression how to transform ourselves and the place where we live into a receptacle that allows life to develop harmoniously for ourselves, our family and friends, the members of our local community and the strangers who visit us. Creativity is focused on quality, and not on quantity; its purpose has a sacred dimension because it is linked with the meaning of life and the search for truth as well as with our capacity to love and be generous in contributing to the wellbeing of others.

Creativity is given to us gratuitously as a gift from nature. We get it at birth and it is a faculty we develop through our own experience, in our private sphere as well as thanks to the support of our social milieu. We learn how to become more and more creative and responsible, and we develop at the same time our related abilities like intuition, imagination, sense of commitment, intellectual faculties, memory, knowledge, know-how, artistic skills, craftsmanship, physical agility, health, wisdom, communication, as well as each of our personal or collective gifts and abilities. Otherwise creativity means also ability to become aware of the quality which is given to us and our gratefulness for the gifts of life.

Some people have received more than others from nature and society; they owe inevitably more to society in return. Faculties and the means to develop them do not constitute, by nature, a personal wealth generating personal advantages and privileges, but it is a natural and social gift made, in different ways and measures, to most people who acquire then simultaneously a kind of obligation, in the same proportion as the gift received, to give back anything they can. Money should not create a hierarchy by rewarding more the ones to whom nature and society has given more. In fact, because of the gratuity of creativity and faculties, we are all equal, independently of what we have received. The ones who have received more, owe more; the ones who have received less, owe less.

General knowledge is a heritage of collected human personal and collective experience in the past and in the present. It depends on the quality of the context in which each of us is developing. Material, intellectual, emotive, spiritual conditions for our personal growth and deepening are given essentially by our direct surroundings. It is, here again, a pure gift. Work (as expression of our creativity) becomes in this case our faculty to transform what we receive into what we

assimilate and what we give. This is like a digestive process; we transform what we receive into what we create and offer it back to society.

Gratuity of being and gratuity of creativity are the basic conditions for our living. Our conditions of life are based on the quality of our creativity which consists in linking the different aspects of our subsistence into something new which enhances life and love, and opens new doors for new discoveries and new opportunities for all. As a basic natural resource creativity is given freely and it provides the main energy for our work. By nature work is the practical process where creativity can express itself. It includes of course all practical and material aspects of our subsistence. Creativity is not something aloof, out of touch. It concerns all material and immaterial aspects; its power resides in its own way to create new connections, to combine partial aspects of our abilities and life conditions in a new way which will offer a better quality. As a mean for transformation creativity is essentially about a qualitative growth which can yet mean less material, less means, more simplicity. It is why work, in its creative dimension, is focused on meaning; quality is narrowly connected with the meaning of life.

Therefore work is not a quantitative process which would consist in accumulating more and more, but it is a qualitative process which aims at providing what is the most meaningful and necessary in regard to the sacred meaning of life. Creativity is eminently spiritual because it concerns the aim and the choice of the right means for a true life. Work, as we will see, should stop when the aimed quality is attained and should become then pure celebration. Work in this sense is sacred because it has to conform to the sacred character of life and to express it in its materiality.

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And the truth of this statement can only take shape in very practical ways: in how we educate our children, in how the baker bakes his bread or the bricklayer builds his wall. Sacredness is not about immaterial things; it is seriously embedded and incarnated into the many material and practical conditions and expressions of life. Gandhi used to say that we all need to practise daily manual work because it keeps us in touch with reality. When we work with our hands and with matter we cannot cheat because we are confronted with the test of what really is. The heaviness and slowness of matter force us to see things as they are. On the opposite computers are the most treacherous tools because the virtual world allows us to create the fiction we want to and we too often get lost in the virtual world we have created. In this way and despite or because of their incredible potential these virtual tools mislead us into the fuzzy realm of virtuality. By contrast manual work remains constant and stable and imposes onto us its rule of time and space. Manual work is a true form of meditation that prevents us from losing touch with the here and now. Heaviness of materiality keeps us rooted in patience and humility. This means that manual work should be a necessary component of daily life, of course not at the exclusion of other immaterial activities. The middle way is the rule.

Transformation as life embodiment

Transformation is the movement of creativity which embodies our life energy and awareness into something we value most.

Beyond our immediate needs for subsistence we can choose what we want to embody our life energy into. What we focus on and what we do becomes the core of our life and expression. When we consecrate all our time and energy to the material conditions of our living (comfort, accumulation, prestige, power), we make these conditions

central to our life. On the opposite, when we wish to remain faithful to self-limitation in a spirit of chosen poverty, we become able to empower ourselves to embody our creativity and life energy into more invisible but more essential dimensions of our life, like creating social link, offering love and attention, caring for others, committing to justice issues. The focus of our creation is the embodiment of our life. This is a basic human right to be able to choose into what one wishes to be incarnated. Yet this possibility of choice seems to remain a privilege in our world today, when one looks on the degraded conditions of work and survival many people know or on the conditioning of so many people who believe to be free in our poorly materialistic society.

As life is not about creation of wealth but about transformation, it challenges us to choose into what we want to embody our creativity and life energy. The focus of our attention can remain individualistic and egocentric. In this case we will feel lonelier despite our possibility to accumulate more material well-being. If we choose to offer the sacredness of our work to the community we are part of, we become more focused on collective issues which allow us to become givers instead of takers. Our life energy can then be embedded into higher and more spiritual values which yet do not exclude that this wider expression can find its way also through material change and physical action.

We are responsible for the choice of what we want to embody our creativity into. This possibility for choice is essential, yet it remains a privilege when one compares it with the life of so many people who have to struggle so much to survive and who therefore do not know what this choice for the quality of embodiment means. Nevertheless this quality of choice remains central in life and should be restored, protected and made available for all people. The protection of this

quality of choice offers the best way to recover the high value of our work as an expression of our sacredness and creativity.

Shadow work

Most of our work is not paid: household work like cooking, cleaning, education of children, gardening, maintenance...

As Ivan Illich described it, the most part of the work we do is for our own maintenance or for the one of our dependants and friends. He calls this work *shadow work* because it is not considered as work in our modern society, for the reason that it does not earn any income. Yet it is a form of work which is probably more directly related with our basic needs. Our modern world has generalised the use of money to allow access to goods and services and money has become a powerful means for control and improvement of our material condition. Yet rural and traditional societies are used to produce directly what they need, mostly without the use of intermediary exchanges through money. Goods are either directly consumed or bartered. And the shadow work we do is in this sense very typical of the traditional vernacular way of satisfying needs.

When we go shopping to buy the food we need or when we cook and prepare the meal for the whole family, we do shadow work. And it is the same when we take care of our children or when we repair the roof of our house. This form of shadow work is largely dominant in our life, even if we have also a paid job.

As for shadow work there is no clear limit between work and leisure, especially when we are self-employed. Is the time we spend with our children shadow work or pleasure? Luckily it can be both! In self-

sufficient forms of economy almost each work is shadow work that does not exclude the dimension of pleasure and leisure.

In the same way there is no clear distinction between shadow work and our paid job as they are both necessary parts of our subsistence. Housewives (or husbands) who stay at home caring for the children and for the maintenance of the domestic sphere are producing as much as their husbands (or wives) who go everyday working as teachers or welders or bakers. In this case the income of the one who “works” is necessary for the subsistence work of both husband and wife and for the care of their dependents.

Some have proposed to remunerate the work of “housewives”; it would mean an increase in the power of money on our life. It would on the contrary seem to me more appropriate to reduce the impact of money and to give more meaning to subsistence and creativity in our work, whether at home or in a paid job.

Shadow work of the universe

The whole universe works ceaselessly for our wellbeing; such shadow work is more essential than any other form of work.

There is all around us a huge quantity of work provided by forces and people without which or whom we would not be able to survive. Yet we are rarely aware of what they provide us with. It starts with the sun shining onto our little Earth. This provides all the energy we use, whether solar, wind, wood, coal, fuel, or photosynthesis. The whole universe with its rhythms and cycles provides an important work of transformation to make resources available for life. The capacity of soil to nourish plants and to help them grow is another form of shadow work. The alternation of day and night, of seasons and

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natural cycles of restitution of resources are working in a similar way for the same purpose. Rain, rivers, air, minerals, animals never stop working hard and we pick up the fruits of their labour, from the worm which maintains the soil to the bee which pollinates our trees. And on top of all this our universe amazes us with its beauty: the song of the birds, the never ending imagination of new forms of life, the different types of light according to the time of day or season, the sounds of a creek or of the wind, etc. Beauty is doubly a fruit of shadow work: we are not aware of the tremendous work to provide it and its function is too often discarded as not essential. As we see, the whole universe is working relentlessly to provide what is available in an incredible almost wasteful abundance.

And, similarly to this generous work of the Universe, we educate our children and provide food for our family or help our neighbour freely. In the shadow of the night many people are working for our wellbeing, for the supply of energy, in health or transport services; although they get paid for it, it is hidden work too. In fact what we consider as serious work for the simple reason it is paid is just a minor part of our life, although sometimes it takes most of our time and our energy. Most of what we get – and probably the most essential part - is provided by shadow work.

There is not much to add because this wider aspect of shadow work escapes our control. Yet it is essential that we remain aware of its role in our life, as it is the most impressing sign of gratuity and generosity of our natural and social environment. This is precisely the tragedy of our economic system; it has lost the sense of what this contribution brings to our life: it is just life itself. This single truth is probably the most powerful argument to demonstrate that our economic system is based on pure non-sense.

Despite this basic truth about the gratuity of the shadow work of the universe and despite the character of gratuity of all these resources, it is also important to examine in more depth the relation between work and money, and why work finally costs.

Necessary compensation for work

Although creativity is freely given, work needs to be compensated for as it is linked with the duration of our subsistence and its needs.

Natural and social resources are free; our being and our creativity are freely given to us too. Yet work needs to be compensated for. In our market society work is meant to provide the financial means that can pay for our subsistence. Work is indeed narrowly connected with the time dimension, with the duration of our life and the needs for subsistence (food, shelter, education...) that ensue out of this duration. If we get compensation for our work, it is for the reverse reason of the one the market proclaims: we do not get compensation for the workforce, the faculties, the creativity we provide to an employer or to the beneficiary of our own activity; we get actually compensation because we need, as condition prior to any work, to have first our subsistence provided in order to be in a second stage able and free to provide the skills, the creativity and the services we are meant to bring to our surroundings. In other words, without being first kept alive we cannot provide any skills! This unusual form of expressing this truth rectifies the deep distortion and inversion the market has created in our minds and culture about work as a good to be sold.

Economy has inverted the relationship between work and money. Capitalism has made out of our work a merchandise and we have now to sell it on the market for the best price we can, while the buyer

tries to pay the minimal price for it. The laws of social harmony show that it should be the contrary: our community needs our creativity and therefore has to provide us with the necessary means for our subsistence because it needs to support our contribution to society. Without this basic support offered by the community we would have to care in priority, and in an egocentric way, for the subsistence of ourselves and our family instead of being helpful for our community. Because we all belong to the same body, like cells or organs, we are all interdependent and need each other. The quality of our life depends on the quality and harmony which we all together can create on the general community level; and the general community has to provide the conditions that allow creativity and expression for all and for each one. This duty of community is of course the work of its members, all together. This is the paradox of life: I need first to eat, and then I can work. Capitalism says the contrary and we all stupidly believe it is right!

According to this definition of subsistence as the necessary condition for creativity, the financial compensation, or salary, is calculated to make subsistence possible for the worker and his dependants for the whole duration of the requested work. Capitalism has well understood this necessity but has twisted it drastically to its advantage through the inversion I just described above; the salary is understood as the minimal wage which can maintain the worker alive, independently of the number of hours he has to work for ensuring his own subsistence. Free market economy has in this way clearly understood that subsistence - reduced in this case to pure physical survival - is the key of exploitation; it is the minimal price to be paid in order to extract the whole substance of the worker.

The principle of subsistence I propose here does not seem very different, yet it is completely the opposite. The intention is

fundamentally different: the means for subsistence are provided first in order to allow creativity to flow. The salary should be offered in order to make creativity possible, and not as a reward for creativity. Of course, this new form of contract means confidence, which is in any case at the core of any work contract. Even free market economy has accepted to practise partially this form of trust: the fix monthly salary the worker gets at the end of the month does not depend directly on the quality of his work during this same month, although it remains clear that this quality will nevertheless be evaluated on a longer duration.

The main components of transformation

Goods are composed of material (natural resource), knowledge (experience), creativity (spirit) and duration of subsistence (work).

It ensues out of what has been described above that transformation is made possible by four main components; work is the only one of them that truly costs:

- 1) Natural resources are free and provide the necessary material and support for any transformation into the goods and services we need. It includes all form of energy which we need. Before they are extracted, materials and energies are pure natural resources (water in the creek, tree in the forest, sunshine in the sky, water accumulated at the top of the waterfall). Work (see 4) needs to be added for transformation and transport in order to make these resources available and usable.
- 2) Knowledge and know-how are provided free of charge by our society (family, school, university, corporation, community) as a form of wisdom and experience accumulated by our predecessors. Knowledge tells us how to use material in a

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technical and practical way and also how to make the best choice for the right use and measure. Work (see 4) needs to be added to this free heritage in order to make this experience and wisdom available into books or teaching (need for materials, for books, for schools, for training, for teachers) and in order for these knowledge and wisdom to be assimilated.

- 3) Creativity is given freely to us as a power to transform ourselves and our surroundings in order to make our subsistence possible and our world a better place for all. It is an extension of knowledge. It defines the quality of the choice how materials and physical or social energies have to be oriented towards a positive end. While knowledge is a fruit of past experience, creativity is the spirit which reinterprets the past experience and chooses the quality which will be cared for. This quality defines principally the meaning of the process of creativity as it loads it with its real significance. The spiritual quality of the process and of its purpose reveals itself to be in fact more important than the end result. Work (see 4) needs to be added in order to identify and to deepen the meaning of what has to be done. The search for truth and wisdom, for the meaning of life, requires a lot of consecration and commitment, and time. It is what pragmatism too often neglects and it is why also too often things go wrong, by lack of thought and quest for the right purpose.
- 4) Work is inevitably combined with each of these three previous stages - or components - as no transformation we plan can happen without us doing what needs to be done. Work remains yet accessory in regard of the importance of the natural energies that foster growth (for instance food) and transformation (for instance climate). Work is the necessary energy for transformation that can only be active if the three other free resources are provided: natural resources, knowledge and creativity.

In summary we have three free resources in which work has already been and has still to be added and embedded. Work, included its embedded part in these three previous components, is the only one of these four components which is not free because it is linked with the duration of the needed subsistence that makes it possible. This duration is not an hourly rate but a global duration of our subsistence (in days, weeks, months) while we provide the work we do. This time includes also time for all necessary actions concerning our work (research, trials and errors, thinking, designing, transport to the work place, tea breaks), time for recovery (eating, sleeping), for recreation (relaxing, leisure, contemplation), for all necessary maintenance work (household, education, garden, housing), as well as for our social commitments (family, neighbourhood, community). This global duration is the time of our life which is also freely given to us, but of which subsistence and costs have to be considered because we do not live in a society where everything is free.

In other words work has to be compensated for because everything is not free in our society. If it were, subsistence would be free too and work would not have to be compensated for. This is a vicious circle. Let's accept that everything cannot be free because, if it were, we would have no control on how much everyone contributes to the wellbeing of all. This is a very weak argument; yet it is the only reason which can justify why work has to be compensated for. Strange world we live in!

The main components of price

The price of goods has to express 1) the gratuity of resources, 2) the cost of embedded work, 3) the cost of subsistence, with no profit.

Out of the precedent considerations about the nature of resources and work, we can edict a simple rule for the formation of the price of goods.

First it must be noticed that value and price are two different things on the market: the value of goods is linked with what is involved to make them available and how much these goods are needed, while the price is the product of a complex conversion of this value into a monetary quantity which is influenced by many factors (costs, offer, demand, scarcity, competition, money availability, fashion, speculation, etc.). We consider here so far only the relationship between the real costs of transformation and the nature of the final product. It is accepted that the price should be the true representation of real costs (which is not the case in a market economy, as we will see later):

- 1) The free availability of resources (natural resources, materials, energy, knowledge, creativity) does not generate any cost for the user and therefore the part of necessary material, energy or creativity (raw as they appear in nature or freely given by society) does not participate in increasing the price of the finished good. It is evident that natural resources and energy, in their raw states as they are available in nature, are provided freely and do not include any embedded work. This evident truth will shock many!
- 2) Each resource (material or immaterial) needs yet to be worked on in order to be made available or transformed. It means that work must be added. Once the transformation has happened, this part of work cannot anymore be dissociated from the material or good itself, because it is incorporated in it; it is why it is called embedded work. It becomes an intrinsic part of the material or good which has been made available or transformed by this necessary but accessory contribution of work. The more a good is

transformed, the more it includes embedded work. The tree in the forest does not include any, while the boards which have been milled out of it embody also the part of work which has been necessary to cut the tree down, to transport it to the mill, to mill the boards and to store them. Later on, the table which will be made out of these boards will embody this first part of work to which the necessary work for the creation of the table has still to be added. The more we go down the transformation line, the more the addition of work constitutes an important part of the product, and the raw material a proportionally lesser one, although the total quantity of used material cannot diminish (including wastes). It is important to see that embedded work is only made out of work from the past. To this category belong all kinds of costs linked with material, energy, infrastructure as these are all costs due to embedded work, given the raw resources are free.

- 3) Very distinct from embedded work is the work in the present which is in fact the only real cost in the present process of transformation, due to the effective cost of subsistence, for the limited but global period of time necessary for the work to be done in the further transformation of the given materials or goods. The successive and different stages of transformation (work and creativity as subsistence) will add their further contribution to the increase of price. Each new contribution (transformation, transport, storage, sales or other) will become embedded work at the end of each stage of the process. In the final good no distinction can be made between material and work. Altogether they form one only good. And the key of this increase in price is only the cost and duration of cumulated subsistence.
- 4) We can add a last category which is of a very different nature: the costs or overheads, that are the costs for administration, rent, insurance, research, training, maintenance, growth, adaptation, etc. that are related to any kind of work, whether in a corporation

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or at home. For instance any corporation needs a margin of security or a reserve for future investments and adaptation. We will examine later, as part of the bricks of economy linked with ownership, this aspect of growth, of research, of training which are of very different nature from what we have examined at this stage. For now we can say that most of these costs can be included in the three previous category, either as a resource (energy, land) or as embedded work (materials, building) or as costs for subsistence (administrative work, maintenance, research).

In summary we could say - in our simplification which excludes any market's influence - that the final price of a good should represent the four categories described above: 1) the free availability of natural and social resources and means (infrastructure), to which 2) the cost of embedded work (cost of work which has been added in the past) and 3) the cost of supplementary work in the present transformation (cost of present subsistence) are added, 4) with a last supplement for indirect costs and overheads to be incorporated as part of a general reserve for the corporation (margin, investments, research).

This simplified decomposition in four categories is true for any acquisition of raw materials as well as for the use of energy, the maintenance of the infrastructure, the transport, the management, the promotion, the sales, or for the contribution of more invisible qualities like knowledge, health, wisdom, etc. Every part of a good or a service consists finally either in any free resource or in some embedded work.

Now let's see how the recognition of the truth that work - and not any other resource except their part of embedded work - is the only

component which needs compensation changes our relationships between people and our relationship with work and creativity.

Equality of all in relation to work

As subsistence is the key for the remuneration of work, people are equal in relation to remuneration because their needs are similar.

Work should not be a merchandise one sells on the market for the price of a salary but an opportunity to express one's own creativity in order to contribute to the well-being of the community, in response to the necessary means for subsistence the social group provides originally. This narrow link between work and subsistence duration means that needs for subsistence become the new key for defining the necessary compensation for work. All people become in this way more or less equal as their needs are approximately equal too. We can see how the recognition of the gratuity of resources (material, energy, knowledge, responsibility, creativity, life) abolishes the hierarchy which professions and incomes or salaries are creating in our society. The hierarchy of work should be no more the one of income but the one of social recognition for contribution to the social welfare.

We can observe that differences of incomes arise out of diverse forms of speculation:

- Natural resources like fossil fuels - although they are not sold at a price which would represent their true value after 500 millions of years which were necessary for their transformation - are marketed at a speculative price which is much higher than the price of extraction, refinery and transport. Petrol companies cash in enormous profits which are made possible by the fact that these resources are free and the demand for them is high and by the fact

that nobody cares for their renewal despite their exhaustion will deprive next generations from their use, without speaking of the many environmental and social costs which are not considered and therefore not covered.

- Goods and services can be sold on the market to a price which is much higher than their real cost because no regulation controls the formation of prices and because the conversion from a given utilitarian and symbolic value into price allows profit to become consistent.
- People who are trained by society into highly qualified professions (at university, in hospitals or laboratories) are considered as having the right to take personal advantage of their improved position, although this advantage has been provided freely by the social context.
- Knowledge is rarely considered as something which should be shared freely; it becomes the secretive wealth of private corporations. Patents provide a protection for inventions in a way they often include collective ownership. For instance the patent of genetically modified seeds cannot be dissociated from the original seed and from its capacity to grow in natural soil under the influence of water and sunshine, which are all free natural and common resources and have no right to be patented and made private.

These are only a few examples that concern further themes to be investigated later. Yet to counterbalance these examples, it is important to notice the following observation: the fact that only work, and not resources, can be compensated for is already the guiding line for most small corporations. Because of competition and their small impact on market, their prices are already calculated at a minimum which allows only work to be paid for. And work is compensated for according to the amount paid into salaries which are a global

compensation for global subsistence according to duration, truly in tune with what has been described above.

If it is true that work has to be compensated for in a global way, and not at an hourly rate nor according to real production (on piece rate), because it is linked with our global subsistence, subsistence itself and our real needs become the true measures for this compensation. As all people have indeed very similar needs, including material needs like food and shelter as well as immaterial needs like education, esteem and love, work should be compensated for in an equal way for all, independently of the kind of work people provide.

This seems to be a very confronting statement, but it ensues naturally out of the equality of needs between people. Yet something must be added about the expression “the kind of work people provide”: in the present statement the distinction between the different kinds of work concerns only the nature of the trades (baker, bricklayer, farmer, physician or teacher) and not the quality (good, average, bad) which people provide through their effort. The question of quality influences the level of recognition the worker enjoys but does not change the nature or level of his basic needs. The principle of equality remains indeed untouched.

This principle becomes a fascinating and mind blowing fact if it has to be implemented in a very concrete way which means that everybody gets an equal income, independently of the trade they practise. This is the basic truth which seems pretty evident in regard of the diversity of necessary trades and at the same time the equality of needs. Yet it means also that everybody should get the same income whether they do their work in a continuous and serious way, with dedication and commitment, or not. This is the true challenge

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that yet may be partially contested: laziness or negligence should not be encouraged!

Uncertainty of result

If work is globally compensated for, the provided income is no more dependent on the quality of results; this freedom allows creativity.

Work can be compensated for according to its production (hourly rate in a regular process or piece rate in an irregular process) or globally (fix monthly salary). This practice of a fix monthly salary, which is not dependent on production, has certainly been a major social progress of modernity in offering a global income which aims at ensuring first the subsistence of the workers and their dependants. Except for very regular or even monotonous work processes (like on a production line), which are usually less varied and less in tune with our human nature, work reveals itself in most of the cases to be uncertain in its progress and in its results, especially if it is creative. One can have an excellent idea in a fraction of a second which proves to be very productive and effective, or one can also spend hours or even days or months looking for a solution without success. As creativity is a free gift of nature, the first case does not merit a better reward than the second. Both cases are necessary and unavoidable parts of the same search process, the former being luckier or more gifted than the latter, and even very often only made possible because of the latter. It is why a global compensation is generally a basic necessity and an important incentive for creativity.

This is a main characteristic of work to be uncertain in its result. Even very practical activities are confronted to changes of conditions, technical problems, human conflicts or any other kind of temporary blockage. It seems that the Peuhl language has a special word to

express this idea of work without any result. What a wisdom to recognise this aspect of creativity as a basic cultural fact!

Research is by excellence the example of a creative activity which requests patience and perseverance. There cannot be any discovery without times of wandering and getting lost. Yet these apparently wasted efforts and time will finally provide some useful outcome.. or not! The process is in this case global.

The value of work is linked mainly with its duration more than with its results. Although it is evidently meaningless to work without expecting any result, it is also wrong to measure work according to its production or efficiency. Work is not a process of production but a process of transformation of ourselves and of our surroundings as means for expression; as it is a form of expression, work is narrowly connected with duration and with the flow of time in our own life. It is why work is more linked with the conditions of subsistence of the worker than with his “production”. This basic law of nature shows how much, in our modern society and under the influence of free market, we have inverted the relationship between work and time, in making it a simple production process.

The end of privileges

Specialised trained professionals argue that it is right that they earn more because of their investments, commitments, responsibilities.

As it has been mentioned above, everybody should earn approximately the same income, independently of the kind of profession they practice, as they all have similar needs. Yet highly trained professionals argue that their income must be higher because 1) they have invested time in studies and they have invested in their

own practice, 2) they work long hours, 3) they have to take on high responsibilities which mean high risks. Yet none of these arguments can be accepted: the opportunity to receive an academic training is a privilege which allows free sharing of knowledge. Effective costs and investments can be billed as embodied work until they are paid back. Responsibilities are usually covered by insurance. And finally none of these arguments justifies the net increased income these professionals get after paying their costs.

- 1) About the training period: it is certainly a big effort that necessitates time and concentration as well as a financial investment. Yet opportunities for receiving an academic or specialised training constitute a huge privilege and have been provided to these highly trained professionals, in most cases, practically free of charge or at least at a cost which has nothing to do with the real costs of what has been given. All main institutions for training such as universities, hospitals, laboratories are highly subsidised by public funds; on top of this these institutions are truly the privileged places where knowledge is shared freely, even if the infrastructure to deliver it has a high cost. The investment which has been made, as a cost for training or as a cost for installing any kind of practice, can well be paid back, as part of the legitimate real costs of any activity. Yet when the debt has been paid back fully, there is no reason why these initial investments should further justify any increased income.
- 2) About the commitment and the long hours: professionals are free to offer the quality of services they want. Their commitment and seriousness justify highly the public recognition and the respect they enjoy. This is certainly an important reward which money cannot provide. As we will see later, when subsistence - in its larger meaning i.e. including all immaterial or spiritual needs - is ensured, no supplementary income is needed, but immaterial

rewards such as social recognition or joy or moral satisfaction become the real priorities.

- 3) About responsibility and risk: each one is responsible for what they do whatever their profession is. Professional responsibilities are usually covered by professional insurance, which will pay for the repair of the eventual damages and mistakes that would have harmed people or patients or clients. It means that the real financial cost is only the cost of the insurance's premium which constitutes part of the real costs that have to be financed as any other costs. The true responsibility, which has to be understood as a direct human and personal commitment, has nothing to do with money and no money can repay what has gone wrong, especially if it concerns deep human hurts. In this case, only the personal commitment and assistance can be an expression of concern, which has nothing to do with the cost of the insurance's premium.

The contradiction of work

Work is a creative process of expression that concerns our whole being; yet it has been reduced to a simple good sold on the market.

Although work is one of the most precious things we have in terms of creativity and form of expression and giving, our market society has converted it (or more exactly degraded it) into a simple good one can buy with money, like a vulgar tooth brush or bag. As long as the market forces put employers into a position of power upon people because they provide these people with the conditions of their subsistence (salary or money income) in exchange of their workforce, creativity and energy (the inversion I mentioned!), people have no chance to escape this pressure and they have to adapt to, and undergo, this destructive and reductionist law. On the opposite the corollary of this statement says that work can become free from market pressure

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if it can provide subsistence and expression means independently from money considered as a reward for the work which has to be done. It is another way to repeat what has been assessed before: the community has to provide means for subsistence for people before and in order to make possible for them to express their creativity for the well-being of the community.

We have shown how work is an incredible potential for personal expression and creativity. It can only serve the purposes of community and of the wider society if it is managed and understood properly. And everybody will then profit from this common wealth. Work is also an invaluable way to link people because it allows them to help each other in a form of natural complementarity of means, gifts and abilities. Work has of course to ensure first subsistence which mainly requires exchanges (complementarity) with others, but it does not necessarily imply exchanges through money, as in fact an important proportion of our subsistence work is done as shadow work in our private sphere, without being rewarded by money, especially in case of subsistence economy.

In order to better cover subsistence needs and to be more creative and personal, work needs to escape the pressure of market and its conversion into money as a salary or an income. In this purpose it should no more be considered as an economical value or good on which it can be speculated, but it should be compensated for - beyond basic subsistence - by other means such as the essential satisfaction of principal needs, enhancing of social links and public recognition, joy of creativity and of participation in a wider transformation of one's own community, better and wider access to personal or collective facilities which only a direct personal and collective involvement can provide, philosophical or spiritual reward for generous giving and sharing.

Community, whether just the family or the local community, has to provide the frame and the subsistence conditions in order to protect people from unjust pressures from market; we are so accustomed to the usual significance (or lack of meaning) that market has given to work, as a good one can sell, that we hardly can imagine how it would be right for any community to provide the right conditions for safe and sensible work and expression of its members. Yet it is what any normal family does: it creates conditions where children can thrive and develop and learn the true ways of their expression. When children grow older, they find traditionally a form of integration in the wider family or community, learning a trade, developing their own skills while contributing to the subsistence of the group. The base is first offered freely by the community, and then the expression of skills and gifts comes as an answer, contrarily to what market does.

Most societies provide a similar caring frame, while educating adolescents and taking care of sick or older people. Mature communities care for their members and get enriched by what these members return. In a similar way national states invest into public work in order to create jobs; this can be done in a more appropriate manner when it is done by the local community because it knows best what is needed. It can even create jobs or possibilities for precise people and skills as it knows directly everyone. Personal well-being depends on the quality of what the local community can offer; it is a clause we forget too often, when we believe that wealth is a private issue.

Breaking the equation “work = money”

Work as such has nothing to do with money. We created this destructive link that should be abolished to make us free to live fully.

In our western culture work is understood essentially as the means to earn money that will allow us to ensure our subsistence. Yet subsistence is something very different from money. Of course in our market society money has invaded all aspects of life and it became the only means to access what is necessary for our subsistence unless we live in a form of (relative) self-sufficiency.

Subsistence makes evidently work necessary. In traditional societies it happens independently from money because such societies provide directly for themselves what is needed, i.e. without going through the intermediary of market exchanges. Barter usually comes as a necessary complement as people can't in general provide everything they need.

Subsistence starts with imperative surviving needs such as food, water and shelter, but it soon develops into more subtle needs that concern more the social or psychological or spiritual dimensions of our being, such as for instance recognition, social link and love. Subsistence starts first with fundamental material needs and develops later into more immaterial fields. This looks a bit like a pyramid set on its point: we start with a few basic material needs at the point and further, as one goes into the broader part of the pyramid, we may consider wider immaterial needs, as soon as the situation has improved and as more desires can be considered and answered. We are essentially spiritual beings that need only a few material conditions to be satisfied in order to essentially allow us to discover wider horizons. Of course this is true only for lucky people who can afford to deal with more than just surviving.

This statement of basic minimal needs means that subsistence can pretty easily be satisfied, especially in a society that cares for the needs of all, in a spirit of equity and justice. It means also that, as we will see later, we can stop working for our own material subsistence as soon as the minimum conditions are provided; then we can focus our energy on the satisfaction of wider and deeper needs. This is our first choice: how much do we need for our subsistence? How much do we need to care for ourselves or how much do we include the others in our concern for subsistence? The less we decide we need, the freer we will be. The more we include others in our understanding of subsistence, the more we open to a wider circle of fellow companions.

This is the basic question of defining our minimal needs in a spirit of self-limitation. Now in our market society it happens that subsistence is narrowly linked with money because we have made money the main means to access basic goods such as food, water, shelter. It means that we have to accept this constraint as far as we can't create another alternative where our subsistence would not depend on money. But the basic statement remains true according to which we can stop working for satisfying our basic needs as soon as they are satisfied. We can reduce in this way our dependence on money. It means that our exposure to the constraint of earning money is only defined by the extension of our basic needs as we have defined them.

This basic truth means that the further development of our skills, beyond basic subsistence, can be offered freely to our loved ones and our community. It shows how far work can be considered as free from money in a society that accepts this truth and cares for the subsistence of all. Once our surviving is ensured, we can then work without getting any money for what we do. In our present western

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culture it seems non-sense. Yet it is what we do all the time in our families, in our neighbourhoods, with our friends, in shadow work, in voluntary work and in many other conditions. Why then not make of this attitude a permanent rule that would allow us to work in full freedom and expression of ourselves?

We have to break the equation “work = money” because our conventional way to understand work as linked with money reduces considerably our possibilities for expression, creativity and social recognition. In order to do this we need first to break this understanding that work depends on money. No, work is mainly our tool for creativity, even when this creativity is used for providing the basic goods needed for our survival. Once work is disconnected from money, it can develop freely and provide basic subsistence (cultivate the garden, cut wood, cook) or provide shadow work (raise kids, tell a story) or go into celebration and leisure or even earn some money, either as a slave or as a creative job. There is then no more sharp distinction between the different aspects of work because all aspects can better cohabit and be complementary. It creates even a sort of continuity from the most painful tasks to all forms of celebration, game and joy. Work and leisure become one.

Of course in order to disconnect work from money we need as a priority to make work possible independently from money. It means we have to free work from the dominance of market. This is evidently a long process that is not so simple, but the fact to see clearly the importance of this aim makes it already easier to attain.

Protect work from market pressure

Work can escape the pressure of market when it is not converted into money, is bartered, is exchanged for local currency or is free.

There are in fact many ways to subtract work from the corrosive pressure of market:

- 1) The first and most elementary way consists in producing oneself what one needs. It is what we all do with household work or education of our children, through what we have called shadow work: cooking, cleaning, shopping, sewing, feeding, helping with housework, telling a story, teaching.
- 2) The second way consists in bartering work with neighbours: we know well how we can help each other in exchanging goods and services. I repair your roof and you bake me a cake.
- 3) The third way consists in exchanging services and goods against a local currency that can only be used for getting other goods and services among the same group of people because this local currency cannot be converted into real money. This is only a form of accounting for informal exchanges, in hours or in dollars.
- 4) The fourth way consists in voluntary work which is freely offered to the community, especially once one has satisfied one's basic needs for subsistence.

Let's have a look in more details into these four categories:

- 1) Shadow work: what we practise at home in private can be extended beyond the traditional tasks we are used to practise in our own family sphere. We can learn to repair our own car, maintain the house or even build an extension. We can produce part of our own food. We can try to execute by ourselves any work which is necessary for our own subsistence. This means an opportunity to develop a wide range of very diverse skills. Yet self-sufficiency is rarely attained as we always need some specialised know-how, tools or materials.

- 2) Bartering: one man all alone cannot build a house, but ten men can build ten houses. This simplified saying is especially true for people who do not have access to sufficient money or do not rely on available cash. It is still more effective when natural materials can be used instead of industrialised ones, i.e. when materials available in nature (such as for rammed earth building) can be used, very often by implementing more work, which yet does not need to be paid for with cash. This is also true for any service which can be exchanged between neighbours. This can be done without accounting, in a spirit of reciprocity, when any service which is offered one way calls for a response or compensation in a form of another service the other way; exchanges call in general for more exchanges, as the balance is never reached: there is always one who owes something to the other.
- 3) Local currency: we will examine later how it works. Essentially a group of people decides to keep an accounting of their exchanges inside the group by “paying” for, i.e. measuring, each exchange in a local currency they have created by convention. The currency is not real but allows accounting. This allows also people without access to cash to become involved in exchanges, in developing skills and means of expression, while ensuring their own subsistence. Of course the range of available goods and services depends on what people in the group are able to offer; the wider the diversity of people, the wider the range of services will be. And each one is valued and respected for what they can offer.
- 4) Voluntary work: it is something very frequent. People are in general very happy to contribute to the well-being of their own community. They get respect and social esteem. They are valued for their generosity and for their creativity and skills. This practice of voluntary work appears still more interesting when it is understood in the frame of the precise conditions I have described concerning the necessary compensation for work. Once

subsistence is ensured it becomes evident that we do not need to earn any more money and that we are free to consecrate our efforts to what seems important to us. In caring for the work and life conditions of its members, the local community can encourage this form of direct contribution to its well-being.

It is interesting to emphasise the fact that paradoxically the absence of conversion of work into money allows the participant to save an important amount of money: no proper income, no taxes, no expenses as participation to indirect taxes (so-called GST or Goods and Services Tax), nor to general costs of specialised corporations, nor to interests rates and combined interests, nor to superannuation funds system, nor to shareholder dividends, etc.

In the same way a direct involvement of the members of the community offers the wider possibility for better investments and amelioration. Local people know best the local needs and what has to be done, except maybe for the purely technical aspect. This is also certainly the best way to improve the local small infrastructure.

It is also fascinating to notice that everything becomes suddenly understandable, in real transparency of necessary processes, when one gets directly involved in the practical work itself, instead of earning money to be able to pay the specialist to do the same job: it becomes more understandable how the supply systems work which one has to maintain oneself; or what has to be done for building a house or repairing a car; or how much energy or water is available when one produces one's own energy or water supply; or which skills and which minimal tools are necessary for maintaining the surrounding land. Matter anchors us into reality.

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Accumulation versus circulation and sharing

As long as individuals do not retain for themselves the product of common creativity, it remains in circulation, accessible for all.

The laws of market are based on a fundamental inversion of the laws of life: they say wrongly that everyone should try in each exchange to keep for oneself the maximum profit in order to find happiness. It means that each one should keep and accumulate for oneself the maximum of value which it is possible to detach from circulating goods and services, by retaining it for oneself and depriving therefore others (community) of this same value. It is what we do each time we sell a good at the highest possible price in order to get a maximum profit; we keep the money as a profit while the good becomes dearer, it means less accessible to others. We wrongly believe that profit is natural and good, but profit (which is not the same as the income) is in fact pure theft because it wants to appropriate for oneself the product of common creativity embedded in the good to be sold. Profit is not the honest income earned by a useful and conscientious work, but it is the dishonest speculation which plays with the flexibility of price. While work should be justly recompensed, the product of common creativity should remain in circulation among members of the community, and be therefore accessible to as many people as possible.

When I sell the product of my work on the market, I can either sell it for the minimum price in order to cover my costs and my subsistence, and nothing more, or I can speculate and try to sell it for the highest possible price as I know that some people are ready to pay more for it than what it has cost to me in total and what I need for my subsistence. I can thus hope to get more money for it and to make a profit, in addition to my income. If we admit that this higher price reflects the real value of the object, we can say that this supplement

of money corresponds in fact to a part of value that has been incorporated earlier as quality into the object without costing anything, neither in time nor in material, to the workers who have contributed to the chain of its transformation before me, and without costing anything to me either. This part of supplementary value is certainly the fruit of common wealth: it can be due to the value of the natural resources or to the knowledge and wisdom that has been incorporated into the object as an immaterial quality. When I try to sell the object for a higher price than what it costs me, profit is the part of the value of the object which I try to detach from it and keep for myself, when I get monetary compensation for it. I get paid in this case for something that I did not provide and that should remain attached to the object because this value belongs to the community.

Common wealth should remain accessible to all; profit should not exist; any part of the value of a good, when it is not due to real costs (materials or work), should not be detached from it nor paid separately but should remain part of the total value. Therefore it has to circulate with the good and to remain accessible to all. This is a part of common wealth that nobody can own and that nobody can evaluate the real value of, as common wealth should not be submitted to the laws of market.

When common wealth remains accessible, more people have access to it. The more the total value remains incorporated in the object, the more its circulation provides enrichment to different people. It is evident that it circulates more easily and becomes more accessible when it remains cheap because the price does not increase as consequence of unjustified profit. It is much more preferable for the common good to make wealth accessible than to privatise it. The words “private” and “deprive” have a common root.

Security by numbers or by accumulation

Hunter-gatherers rely on the solidarity of many to provide security; modern age relies on egocentric accumulation by individuals.

We can describe two different systems of social security:

- 1) Hunter-gatherer societies are never sure to find what they need each day for their survival because they do not store, even not the most basic resources like food or water, and have hence to face the unforeseeable in a daily rhythm. In these circumstances they have developed a few basic solidarity rules which oblige each one who has found resources (the lucky hunter, the quick wild food picker, and even the privileged money earner) to share these resources with the other members of the tribe or community, as also others will do later reciprocally when they will be themselves the lucky hunters or the quick wild food pickers.
- 2) According to the opposite logic in our modern society personal ownership is protected in a way that prevents others from having access to it. Sharing is not only not imposed but even it is considered as a virtue, or at least as a clever behaviour, to keep one's own wealth for oneself. It means that each one has to live on their own personal wealth, independently whether they are lucky or in deep need. Social help is only available to correct artificially the negative aspects of this individualistic and absurd rule.

The former (traditional) pattern relies on social links (obligation for solidarity) and on numbers (quantity of members) to provide security while the latter pattern (our modern market society) relies on the individual capacities of each one to satisfy their own needs by themselves. Solidarity (number) is the basic rule for the former, and

individualism (accumulation) for the latter. It becomes evident in this comparison that accumulation kills solidarity and creates more risk for the poor.

Abundance has destroyed our original sense of solidarity. Our modern security is based on accumulation as a main principle for the organisation of our society. Accumulation is an individual movement that focuses on the needs of the individual or of the small group such as the single family. It becomes therefore essentially egocentric. In this way one can see that a form of negative self-sufficiency can deprive people from social links when they believe not to be in need of others.

It is important to distinguish accumulation from storage. Storage is an unavoidable necessity for filling the gaps between times of collection (yields of seasonal crops, opportunities for capturing water or solar energy). Storage has always been in the past time a common security, while accumulation, in the spirit of our modern society, is considered as a fundamental individual right. Storage can allow security as it can also favour speculation. The use it is made of depends on personal and social awareness.

We ignore too often the possibility of numbers. Insurance is based on the law of numbers, but it has been converted into an individual right, depending on the premium that has to be paid. Yet traditional societies have long practised the security by numbers. In the Alps traditional ownership of buildings is often organised according to the principle of division between many owners in order for different owners to have many parts of many buildings, instead of only one building, and hence to enjoy a relative security in regard to fire, avalanches which could destroy one or the other building. Mutual benefit insurance is based on the same principle of sharing between

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many the damages supported by a few. Solidarity is in charge and diminishes the individual costs to be borne by unlucky persons.

As we will see later pension is also a form of solidarity based on numbers. Many active (i.e. younger) people pay for the subsistence of a few older people. Because of the law of numbers it can be done in the present: the ones working today pay for the ones who are old today. There is in fact no necessity for heavy and risky long term investments of superannuation funds, as soon as superannuation is considered as an immediate necessary measure for social solidarity, and no more as an individual accumulation of a personal capital through a long duration of time and for one's own personal interest.

Solidarity through the law of numbers offers more than any form of individual insurance or accumulation. This is the basic principle of any good health or social system which protects all inhabitants of a country. And it has the huge advantage of promoting social links. Security is a common wealth; only a living community can provide it, as soon it is big enough. Depending on the risk at stake, the suitable size of the community (it means the number of members) depends on the geographic spread of this community. It can be at the level of the family, or of the neighbourhood, or of the local community, or of an entire region or nation. Only a healthy community can truly care for the well-being of each member, in equity.

Chayanov's law

The greater the ratio of workers to consumers in a household, the less each worker produces; production stops as needs are covered.

As the consequence of the law of numbers for communities that live on a subsistence basis (i.e. mainly traditional and rural societies), the intensity of production per worker decreases in proportion to the number of consumers per worker. It means that workers in charge of more dependants work harder than the ones who have to feed fewer. In other words the intensity of work depends on the range of the needs multiplied by the number of dependants. Production will even stop when needs are satisfied or when abundance is provided.

Alexander Chayanov (1888-1937) was a Russian economist who studied especially the traditional rural society and wrote a *Theory of the Peasant Economy*, where he showed how the mentality of peasants could not integrate into the soviet pattern of larger farms. He had to pay for this observation with his life when he was killed by the Stalinist regime.

The best example for this kind of behaviour he described are the hunters gatherers. When they have eaten enough and they have fed their dependants, they stop hunting and gathering. On the opposite in our society of abundance we need to accumulate more than we need. We believe that more is better.

It is evident that the implementation of the law of Chayanov means more time for what we call leisure or for more free and creative activities.

The corollary of Chayanov's law

When subsistence is ensured, the community can consecrate itself to spiritual search: the intensity of production becomes maximum.

When the needs for material and basic immaterial subsistence are satisfied, traditional societies tend to stop working for ensuring their material security and spend the available time in activities for no material need i.e. in artistic expression such as dances, songs and rituals. The focus of attention is on immaterial and spiritual matters. The intensity of participation is at this stage maximum.

As the anthropologist Dominique Temple⁷ explains it in other words, subsistence communities work only so far as it is necessary. They tend to consecrate all the available remaining time to what we can call spiritual activities, i.e. immaterial needs and creativity. Creativity is in this case not separated from life. There is no production of paintings for exhibitions nor music for concert halls. Expression is part of everyday life and becomes the way to contribute to the well-being of the group. Music in a gipsy community is like breathing, yet a special art of breathing that happens more easily when the belly is full. Social respect and esteem, as well as power, arise from how people contribute to collective life. The contribution of each one is a free gift to community building.

Temple explains that, when the community consecrates itself to what is called spiritual matter and expression, Chayanov's law is reversed. The intensity becomes maximum, independently of the number of dependants and of the satisfaction of needs because needs on this level are limitless. The creative and spiritual depth of life is fathomless.

The choice for free giving

Once we have satisfied our needs for subsistence, we can choose to work for free; it is our freedom to offer our time and creativity.

If we conjugate Chayanov's law with the fact that the compensation for work has to allow us to satisfy our needs and that this compensation is linked with the total duration of our work and not with the quantity of work we provide, we come immediately to the conclusion that we do not need to provide more work than what we get our subsistence for. It can have either a restrictive effect on our behaviour, if we decide to not provide more than we have to, or it can have a liberating effect on us, if we decide on the contrary that nothing prevents us from providing more and even from doing so free of charge, as our subsistence is already ensured.

The principle of work compensation being linked with the global duration of our needs makes us free to give as much as we want to. According to the corollary of Chayanov's law we are able to go beyond our subsistence needs and provide more, in a similar way as traditional societies tend to do when they consecrate themselves to celebration and rituals. The intensity is then at its maximum. This statement is also valid for us in our modern society. Once our subsistence is ensured we can decide to offer our creativity as a gift to community well-being and spiritual development. Many people practise this way, when they do voluntary work after their work hours. They practise in fact the corollary of Chayanov's law without being aware of it.

We can turn around this statement in order to make it more powerful, in copying the formulation of the law: when our paid work has answered our basic needs, we can work for free, for the beneficiary of the community and for the pure celebration of the gift of life and of

⁷ Dominique Temple and Mireille Chabal: *la réciprocité et la naissance des valeurs humaines*. L'Harmattan, 1995, Paris. Or their website.

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its power for creativity. We enter then the realm of spiritual practice where life is a pure gift and act of gratefulness.

A pension for life

If the community provides each member with a compensation for creativity that covers subsistence, it is like a pension for life.

Basically the principle of the pension system intends to provide people after the age of retirement with the necessary financial support they need for their subsistence, independently of the work they have done during their active life (in type, quantity, quality or duration). We may follow this same logic that is finally identical with the logic of a global compensation which covers all needs of subsistence in order to make the practice of creativity available for all. It is indeed possible to set up a kind of system of pension, not only after retirement but for the whole duration of active life, in order to provide this form of general basic compensation that is independent of the quantity and quality of the work provided.

This idea seems to be complete madness, but let's look at it in more detail. In the same way as the compensation for work as a salary is financed directly by "production", such a system for a pension for life would be financed directly by the same process of transformation (called production) itself. It means it would rely on the law of numbers that I explained before. Pensions have to be financed in the present by the work of people who are working in the present, as it is the case for salaries. It means that this more direct system of pensions would avoid the now usual necessity for investment of heavy capitals under the inherent risks for losses and collapses of the financial system. A system of pension for life would ensure the subsistence of all and provide the same form of freedom for creativity, as it has been

explained before. It would rely on the same contract of trust according to which people have to work creatively and with commitment, as it is already the case with fix salaries. It would ensure an excellent equality of treatment for all, ensuing out of the equality of needs for all, independently of the kind of profession practised. It would change drastically our work conditions for better, especially for the ones who are exploited and are working in conditions where creativity has no room. As work would not be any more a merchandise to be sold on the market, it would allow most of the value of what is produced to remain incorporated in the goods and make it available for all. The protection of work from market forces would help to avoid speculation and profits, because it would prevent most market's mechanisms that allow speculators to keep part of this value for themselves. This would allow goods to be cheaper and more accessible and this would allow people to work less for less needs. This would avoid the huge and unjust incomes of a small minority to be extracted out of the poorer incomes of a vast majority. It would avoid concentration of wealth in the hands of a minority. It would avoid the gap between poor and rich to grow inexorably.

Nevertheless a big problem remains: who would be ready to do the jobs nobody wants? Traditional societies have solved this problem because the pressure of real needs is such that everybody has to do any job which is necessary, without relying on slaves. This pressure for necessity would be an essential factor for improving work conditions in order to make every job attractive. Non-attractive jobs can also be shared as regular collective labour, voluntary work or statute labour.

This description of a pension for life seems to be an utopia, but it is in fact based on many practices that are already effective: the free

sharing of most natural and social resources such as water, sun, or knowledge and wisdom, the free education of our children, the system of fix monthly salary, the pension system for old age, the daily practice of shadow work and of wide ranges of voluntary work, the aspiration for justice and for a more human world, the need for personal recognition, the thirst for social warmth and love. The necessary change for the implementation of such a system consists more in a quantum leap in our awareness when we become capable to see that common wealth is the true wealth that makes us happy, instead of private and egocentric accumulation. Our quality of life depends more on the quality our local community can provide than on the quantity we can accumulate. A true freedom of giving (the choice for free giving) is in fact the basic condition for social recognition and personal valorisation in a process of community building that values more the spiritual than the material aspects of life: more love, more justice, more peace, more creativity and intensity... than more things.

On the other hand the implementation of such a system is not the priority. It would be very heavy if we had to organise a centralised management of the incomes of all. Of course it could be managed locally by corporations or small state offices. But the form of the best implementation is not the main question. The main concern is however about the new spirit and the new understanding of the true meaning of work and subsistence which this idea of a life pension illustrates. It is a spirit where creativity and relationships become central, and where community is in charge of providing subsistence and means for the expression for its members, yet without assisting them but in making them more responsible and more capable of initiative. This is certainly a very different understanding from the way work forces are sold nowadays on the market. Yet, as I wrote it earlier, many daily practices show that this spirit of respect and

belonging is already, and has always been, a very common way to relate to others, to our own creativity and subsistence.

The most striking aspect of this form of pension for life is that a vast majority of people would enjoy a much better material standard than they do now. And the quality of social life would be also incredibly richer. There would be only advantages for most of us, except for a very small minority of people who believe now to be richer... but only in a very restricted material sense. The problem is that we all individually seem to hope to become better off than others. This competitive egocentric and individualistic way of thinking provides the only explanation why a more equal and stimulating form of creativity does not seem possible in our world today. But this reason is only based on an illusion or hope of overtaking the others.

Despite all these positive aspects the down side of a pension for life is that it would practically take the form of public assistance which is certainly not a stimulant for creativity and self-esteem. And this unavoidable state of assistance is certainly the first and last nail in the coffin of this yet fascinating idea!

Private ownership as deprivation

After we have tried to discern what the true meaning of work is, we have to look now at the second category of the bricks of economy: the components of ownership. Our present economic system is based on private property. According to classical economics wealth can be defined:

- 1) as ownership of goods,
- 2) as ownership of land,

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- 3) as access to resources,
- 4) as use of infrastructure,
- 5) as access to capital (with its side aspects of investment, debt, interest rate and growth),
- 6) as privilege of knowledge or access to commons.

These components represent main side aspects of ownership and are the basic necessities for any economic undertaking. Let's examine them one by one in more detail.

1) Ownership: private property as deprivation

Private property is a right to reduce the access others can have to resources and to limit one's own use to what one owns individually.

Private property is generally considered as a privilege: it is based on access to the goods one owns and it excludes others from having access to these same goods. It is usually considered as a positive thing which allows more. But in fact it reduces considerably our possibilities to access the use of goods: one can use only what one owns, and not what others own, and others cannot use what one owns. Private ownership is in fact a systematic way to limit access to wealth. Private ownership deprives.

It is important to make a clear distinction between ownership and access or use.

In our insecurity and fear of others we have established a fundamental principle for our society that protects ownership. Of course it is normal that I own the very personal objects I use constantly in my daily life; my toothbrush and my towel, my plate and my saucepans, my clothes and my bed. These items are mine

because of the intimate and frequent use I have of them more than because I bought or inherited them. It does not prevent me from lending my jumper or preparing a meal for my friends. Ownership arises from the use I have of these items, more than from a real right of property.

Actually, when I limit my use and access to goods to the only ones I own, I reduce considerably my possibilities, as I limit also the access others could have to what I own. This limitation of the access others could have to my own goods is more important for me than the real use I have of them. On one hand the principle of private property protects me from the demand of others and makes me feel secure. Even if I do not use my items, I feel secure that others will not grab them, It protects me from the invasion of too much life into my own daily routine. In this way my storage room is full of things I never use but which I keep carefully out of access by others. On the other hand, in recognising the limitations of use private ownership imposes, I accept to limit also my own use of items others own. I accept also that they store goods I may need but that they do not use. It is evident that it is an absurdity: access and use are practically much more important and necessary than the principle of ownership.

If access has to become the main rule, it means that I am no more protected from the invasion by others' needs. Life becomes more complicated as we have to manage what will be used by whom, in which order of priority and under which conditions. Goods have to be maintained in a good state, and everybody knows how much common property tends to generate a quick degradation of goods, as nobody feels really responsible for their maintenance. Yet the principle of free access remains evidently the main argument for abolishing private property of non-personal goods. It implicates general duties

and responsibilities towards others concerning the proper use and careful maintenance of what is shared.

If access becomes the main principle, then we cannot identify anymore with the goods we own as a sign of social success and recognition. We cannot hide anymore behind a façade of material well-being which presents an image of ourselves that is not related to our way of being but only to our way of having. Life invades powerfully our own life. Is that what we want?

Practically we can imagine a form of sharing which is not a complete abolition of private property. We could share a list of goods each one keeps at home and which remain nevertheless accessible for others in the same neighbourhood: I have a drill, you have a compressor; I have an encyclopaedia, you have a massage table; I know how to cook, you know how to build; there is a creek on the portion of land where we live; there is a lot of wood which grows on the portion of land where you live. Let's decide that each of us can access these common resources. Yet there is a person in charge for managing these goods, organising who has access when and to ensure that goods are maintained in a good state, that resources do not get exhausted, that necessary costs are shared. Such a form of shared access and, in a sense, ownership would multiply possibilities and make each one much richer through the possibilities of accessing goods and resources one does not own, not mentioning the social wealth it would generate by creating deeper and richer links between people.

2) Land as our teacher

We belong to the land more than it belongs to us: it is our teacher. It reveals us the laws of nature and life to which we have to adapt.

The great mistake of our western culture is to believe that the land is just a commodity that we can own and use as we wish to. It is indeed the context that supports us in all meanings of the word. It supports us physically because it bears us. It is our life support because it provides everything we need: life, air, water, food, shelter, materials, etc. But yet it is far from being just a heap of resources to be exploited, because it is a living entity. We can observe this truth each time we disrupt its balance. Any disruption generates consequences that finally hurt us back.

I will not describe here how nature is the world to which we belong. In one hand it is evident, and on the other hand it needs more than a few pages to illustrate thoroughly this other way of considering our physical surroundings.

What matters here is that land is our anchoring in reality. It is also our teacher because it makes visible what is not visible. Without matter we would not be able to decipher the laws of nature and of life. The land makes them visible when one learns to observe. Observation is the tool that gives us access to the core of this teaching that, without observation and attention, would remain unknown.

These laws of nature and life regulate the main equilibriums of our universe. It means that we have not only to respect them but we have also to adapt to them.

In our modern era we have lost the faculty to relate to the land. We believe that our technology can master everything and that everything becomes a commodity to be exploited and used at our convenience.

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This illusion is not only the one main cause of our environmental crisis but it is also the cause of our social and spiritual decay.

Ownership of land is nonsense. We belong to it and depend on it as a part of the commons.

2) Land: land is one

Many species and many nations are used to share the same territory; land “belongs” to those who cultivate it for subsistence.

Ownership of land goes against the laws of nature. Land is not a good for consumption. Its quantity is constant and cannot be increased or changed. It can only be subdivided by artificial means (cadastre, boundary stones, fences). Yet land remains a continuous whole and its different parts are complementary. Wildlife is used to migrate and to relate to different parts of different territories in different seasons. The general interdependence and equilibrium can only remain effective if the whole remains unbroken. Many different species inhabit simultaneously the same territory: birds and reptiles and mammals, accessing different resources on the same portion of land. Different nations or social groups are traditionally used to settle down on the same territory: cultivators and nomads or shepherds, different ethnic groups, different religious communities, as people of different trades or gender or size can well cohabitate on the same portion of land. The nation state is a modern concept which tries to unify any social group that lives on the same territory in denying differences and forms of belonging to different minorities or weaker social groups. Yet humans are not different from animals in this regard. Cohabitation of different ways of life is not only possible but even a source of equilibrium in the name of biodiversity. The territory becomes in this way a network of relationships and of

potentials that the proximity of diverse actors creates and offers to those who see its value.

Land is in fact a common invaluable wealth, even probably the main resource of any community that lives on it. Land is used by each of the local communities to ensure their subsistence. The Earth cannot be owned; it is our Mother who feeds us and provides most of what we need. We can only develop a relationship with the Earth that recognises its own laws of equilibrium. Without this elementary form of respect we would destroy the basis itself of our survival. It is an old principle that land “belongs” to whom cultivates or uses it. This rule is the base for traditional societies; they create a link with the surrounding land because they care for it and maintain it. There is no title of ownership and even, if there is, ownership is subjected to the condition of taking care of the land. This must be done in the respect of the general balance, in adaptation to the laws of natural cycles.

In traditional societies like the Aboriginal one there is no private property of land. Mankind cannot own land because land is sacred and is our Mother. Indeed we belong to the land. The Earth dictates the rhythms of cycles, the laws of balance. It provides abundance or penury; it creates drought and flood; it regulates the seasons; the land provides our food, our water, our air, our wood, our stones and sand, any building material or resources we need, everything we need for our physical survival. The Earth actually does even more: it provides us also with harmony; it teaches us how to find our spiritual balance and to understand the invisible energies like love that guide and orient our subtle development towards deeper consciousness. The Earth owns us more than we can own her. It is indeed the reason why we try to divide it and to possess it because we want to control it and we are afraid of lacking these essential goods it provides.

The local place or territory constitutes or offers a network of relationships between its inhabitants, between the inhabitants and the natural surroundings. This network of relationships offers a potential of creativity and transformation that is necessarily rooted in the local place where we live. It is why the local community plays a central role in our personal or social integration and evolution. The local place is the anchor and visualisation (landscape) of the maturity of the local community and of its capacity to integrate diversity in welcoming the different identities of different cultures and groups.

The more diverse this network is, the richer the community is. It is fascinating to observe how biodiversity is narrowly connected with social diversity. It is noticeable how the countries with the most biodiversity are also the multilingual and diversified ethnic communities. It is why the form of unification or standardisation or levelling that our society nowadays strives towards is an impoverishment. While our modern western society imposes globalization throughout the world it deprives itself from rich contributions by different cultures and traditional societies that are different from our modern culture. Because it imposes itself as the only exclusive way, the universal use of English on the international level deprives us from the wealth of other ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups and from their contributions to global culture. In this way the model of cohabitation of different ethnic and social groups on the same territory - many nations on one territory - appears to be the source of wealth while the standardisation through the implementation of the nation state - one state, one nation - tends actually to create a flat landscape which loses its complexity and maturity, its proper accents and hierarchy of values. The modern cultural landscape we create nowadays is like monoculture.

It is evident that the use we have of the surrounding land varies in intensity and in privacy according to how and for what we use it. Our bed and the surface it occupies in our home is more private than the field we cultivate and more protective and more intimate than the landscape we have in front of us. It is striking how different streets in Mediterranean dense small traditional towns or villages (Greece, Italy, Algeria) show a different degree of privacy. One can immediately feel how much the market place is openly public, how some streets are more public than others while dead end streets are even strongly private. One can notice this even at the way people look at one when one gets lost and enters a more private space. This shows clearly how much the degree of privacy does not depend on ownership but on the use people have of space. Cultural aspects are in this case more dominant than forms of property. Yet our western system has replaced too often these subtle forms of interaction with a special quality of space by a strict rule of private ownership: "private property - no trespassing".

2) Land: ownership as land destruction

Private ownership speculates on land value; it prevents sold land from being used for lesser financial return (e.g. food production).

When land is owned privately, it has to be transferred from one owner to the next in submitting to the laws of market. Its price will increase each time it is sold although its value remains the same. High prices prevent land from being used for purposes that do not allow financial return in proportion with its market value, unless the owner accepts to lose some of the capital he has invested or unless the block of land escapes market value because it has never been sold. As long the owner does not convert his land into a financial capital the use of it remains free, but as soon it is sold the function of

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land becomes narrower and narrower in the same proportion as the increase of the capital invested to acquire it. Through the simple act of selling and buying, and still more under the influence of usual speculation, land prices increase and prevent a free use of it. It means market exchanges destroy indeed the value and use of land.

Especially speculation prevents expensive land to be used for functions with small financial return, like for natural protection or for immaterial reasons (peace, beauty) or like for food production - although this is certainly the most valuable and appropriate use that can be made of land. In our modern world more and more land is excluded from agricultural use although the global population increases drastically.

In our insane world we believe that we can enhance the value of existing land by simply building an infrastructure for car access, connection to water and electricity networks, or subdividing an existing larger lot. By doing so we indeed diminish the possibilities for use because we only choose to privilege a specific narrow function at the cost of other possible uses and exclude what could still be done on this block of land before it gets sold. The sale itself creates a condition that cannot be reversed or can only with difficulty. Once the price has increased, no owner is willing to sell the land for a lesser price, unless he or she is obliged to.

Private land ownership implies that land prices and uses are defined by market. Speculation on real estate accelerates the destruction of its user value. There is a strange tendency of the market to value more land blocks which are further away from nature. Land gets its market value from accessories and contextual aspects that have little to do with the land itself. A tiny flat in an urban context can be sold at a

higher price than a large block near a national park. Illusion of what true value is!

These destructive influences by ownership status and the laws of market yet only become effective when the land is sold. As long land is used and not sold its hypothetical price according to market remains virtual and does not influence the use it is made of it unless it incites the owner to sell it. The law of destruction is particularly effective in countries where real estate is frequently sold, in comparison with countries where it remains in families and is inherited from one generation to the next. Yet the attraction of market and the possibility of actualising the potential financial value of land remains a powerful factor that participates sometimes in converting a whole secluded region to real estate market, especially in contexts of tourist development.

3) Resources: natural resources as a gift from nature

Resources are not dissociated from land and nature; we are all parts of a wider system of interdependence ruled by natural cycles.

This statement about natural resources as being part of the land we live on is the corollary of the precedent statement about the unity and continuity of land that cannot be owned privately. Natural resources are provided freely by nature, as I have already demonstrated. We can only consider their use for our needs, without exhausting them and in a respect for the natural cycles that make them available for all. In the same way wastes are like resources because they can only be absorbed by the natural surroundings when they are transformed and recycled into resources for the next step of the cycle. Our use of natural resources is therefore regulated by the time (season) when nature produces them, by the variation of quantity which becomes

available according to the special conditions of the time, by the speed of production and by the speed of absorption of resulting wastes, by the localisation where they are or can be produced or reabsorbed. Density of resources and of users is in this case a determinant factor. It is important to clearly establish the link between density of users and respect of the laws of nature.

Demography has often been considered as the most important issue concerning the ecological challenge. Certainly density is linked with demography and it participates in defining the intensity of the impact of a community on its land. But more important is the following paradox: the imbalance in demography results principally from the way we exhaust nature resources; much more than demography is the cause of the impact of a community on nature. In other words demography is the consequence and not the cause of the environmental balance or imbalance. In nature demography has always been naturally regulated by the quantity of food that is available in the near environment. A natural species will increase its number when a lot of food is available, but then penury will participate in reducing the numbers of this same species when food becomes rare, especially if this penury is the consequence of the high numbers of beings which feed on this resource. Our modern society has twisted this law of natural regulation by storing and transporting (which is not necessarily in contradiction with the laws of nature) but also especially by exhausting the surroundings through an artificially intensive exploitation that does not respect natural limits and forces nature to provide more than it can. This results in degradation of soils and ecosystems, in most cases far away from the place where the products are consumed. In this way destruction of nature is the cause or necessary condition that allows demography to explode without checks and balances.

Poor societies are generally more aware of the limits of what their environment can provide. It does not mean that they will respect these limits and procreate less but it makes the connection between availability of food and number of people living on the land more evident and makes the reason clearer why a given population takes a high risk when procreating more than the environment can allow it.

The process of urbanisation has made this direct link of dependence on nature less easy to observe and be aware of. It is striking to imagine that our modern society would have a very different way of looking at demography if each of us had to find their own food in nature. Transport, although it could be in harmony with the laws of nature, hides the impact on nature of our consumption because it exports its destructive effects to other and generally poorer countries. Money and power modify deeply the way essential goods like food are distributed and shared. These many twists allow our society to increase its members without seeing the limits it has overcome.

This other way of looking at demography does not mean demography should not be considered as an important issue for our survival; it just says that it should be seen before all in its deep connection with the laws of nature. A rich American has more impact on the environment than 10'000 Bengali. If only the one richest tenth of the world population would reduce drastically its consumption to equal the average level of the nine other tenths, the demographic balance of our world would be globally restored. Nevertheless our modern scientists and politicians speak of reducing birth rate in poor countries, and never in the upper rich classes of our richest countries! One wonders why!

These considerations about demography show clearly how natural resources cannot be grabbed by the mighty and rich but can only be

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shared proportionally to the urgency of the essential needs they cover, in harmony with the laws of natural cycles.

Energy is certainly the most striking example in what concerns the exploitation of natural resources. Sustainability and justice become evidently the two basic criteria for the way it should be produced, shared and used.

4) Infrastructure: its 3 qualities

A good infrastructure offers the (ecologically, ethically) best adapted means for the right purpose; it remains accessible to many.

Infrastructure includes all means for an activity: land, buildings, machinery, tools, energy supplies, access to necessary resources, transport facilities, know-how, etc. As I mentioned it about technology, it is its role to define the right purpose and choose the adequate means, in remaining accessible for the whole community. “Right”, “adequate” and “accessible” remain in a certain way subjective values but these qualities can yet be defined in a precise way:

- 1) The right purpose is the aim which serves ethical priorities like justice, equity, peace, generosity, by reducing poverty or providing the essential goods for subsistence, or improving conditions for the health and well-being of many, in harmony with the laws of nature, opening more opportunities for education, creativity, solidarity, cooperation, aiming at a spiritual quality of life. Or many similar purposes.
- 2) The adequate means refer to the same values, with the addition of a choice for the minimal necessary means. Self-limitation is in fact an important aspect of the choice of the adequate means,

especially when available means are powerful and tempting to achieve more than strictly necessary. The principle of cautiousness is its corollary.

- 3) Accessibility is the quality of what remains public and useful for the whole community or at least for the ones who can need it. Accessibility is the opposite of what I have described concerning the private property.

These three qualities are narrowly linked, as if each of them would be a condition for the two others. It is interesting to look at the nature of the links between these three qualities, especially in the case when profit becomes the major motivation:

- 1) The purpose of the action is certainly the dominant factor. It defines the whole chain and the nature of the infrastructure. If profit is the main purpose, as it becomes more and more the case in industrial “production” and in financial trade, ethical considerations are usually absent, considerations for usefulness and public interest are also generally non-existent. On the opposite, corporations which care for the well-being of their clients and the quality of their products will organise their production in a fundamentally different way where the human dimension will be present.
- 2) If the purpose is mere profit, means aim also in this case at profit only; they can be very crude, based on extreme human exploitation, ecological destruction, deceiving the confidence of clients, etc. On the opposite ethical production will take care of the quality of work conditions, of the impact on the environment. Special labels refer more and more to this kind of quality of means, although these same labels are often imitated by unscrupulous corporations in order to create confusion in their client minds and become means for deception.

3) If the purpose is profit, competition and secret become the rules; it means restriction of access to anything the corporation owns or controls. Even common goods or knowledge are integrated into this secret ownership like through patents or keeping secret what has been the result of public research and funding. On the opposite many corporations share openly their knowledge because they know that a free exchange is the basic means for increasing this knowledge. Internet is in this way a very interesting way of having knowledge to be shared freely and made more accessible for all.

In general, public services should aim at right purposes, adequate means and accessibility for all; but it is far from being the case. Because mainly of ignorance, of awkwardness or of fear, but also often because of elitist interests and influences. On the opposite many private corporations have an exemplary behaviour.

Out of these qualities of purpose and process ensues an infrastructure with special qualities that demonstrate the maturity and awareness of the managers of the corporations or public services involved.

A few examples:

- A public library makes knowledge available for all. Interconnections between libraries allow a wider choice. Some libraries send even books to the private address of readers who live far away from cities.
- The system of public transport can rely also on private car sharing or on a dense complementarity of different modes, including non-polluting means of transport such as bikes for rent.
- Industrial production can be planed according to financial effectiveness or to the quality of work conditions for the people involved.

- Cheap goods from China are produced for profit only; they are meant to be as cheap as possible and not to last because people prefer to buy cheap items, disregarding quality. A huge quantity of a small profit allows more profit than a smaller quantity with a larger profit per item. Quantity and cheap prices become the rule for a maximum return on investment. Work conditions and ecological considerations degrade.
- And many others...

5) Capital: power or motivation

Capital is a potential that has to be converted into work, resources and means; for distribution to many or for concentration for a few.

Capital has, before all in our own understanding, a financial meaning, but money has no power in itself unless it can be converted into work, resources or means for transformation. The true meaning of capital is indeed human and represents the real potential that can create. It refers more to human creativity (know-how, knowledge, skills, right understanding, ethical and spiritual consciousness, imagination, perspective, courage, independence) and social maturity (desire to create a just and human community) than to mere financial means which remain yet in any case necessary because they may enable the necessary work and means to be implemented. It is important to understand that financial means cannot create the favourable conditions as long as the human faculties are not present to be activated. This statement shows the short-sightedness of most investments that are motivated by profit.

Money is only a means to be converted into life energy but it cannot create life. It can only encourage its expression where it is ready to be expressed. The true quality is the one of the social network: is the

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social body able to design a mature and adequate project and to implement it? Only when this true quality is fulfilled financial means can intervene and provide the practicalities. In fact capital (whether social or financial) is a form of power and motivation; it drives an existing potential into expression. Essential is of course the question whether this expression aims at distribution of these existing faculties and wealth in making them available for all or whether it aims at more concentration and accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few.

It is important to remember that societies that do not have access to money (i.e. to financial capital) rely indeed on their own social capital: time, creativity, work, skills and means can be provided directly, without going through the conversion into or out of a financial intermediary. Social maturity, imagination and courage are the true means of creativity and constitute the true qualities of human capital. These qualities make the whole difference between a more human and sustainable development and a crude undertaking oriented towards egocentric interests or mere accumulation of power and profit.

When it is not a human one in terms of human creativity, capital is nothing else than an accumulation of money. The main question is how it can be constituted. In our modern world today it arises mainly out of speculation. It is rarely constituted by savings that have been accumulated through time but it consists generally in borrowed money which is invested at a more favourable rate, hence providing a profit. It is evident that this way of accumulating what is called wealth is principally accessible to rich people who have access to credit, increasing in this way the gap between rich and poor. But much more important, this activity of speculation on interest rates reveals itself to produce nothing and to be only a parasite that feeds

itself from the system in general and destroys it from inside, as a sign of its own corruption.

The time is long over when one saved patiently what one could out of one's income, it means out of the produce of one's work, in order to be able to invest it into an improvement of one's life. Work today hardly pays for subsistence... when it does. Accumulation comes principally out of speculation: speculation on exchange rates, stock exchange, gambling, bonuses, premiums, etc. This is certainly the most acute problem of our present economic system. Instead of aiming at the satisfaction of essential needs, the whole economy is hence oriented towards speculation and illusory creation of wealth, which is indeed just stolen from others, because no speculation can provide any income without this gain being unjustly taken from the community and its common wealth or from someone who has been involved in the production on which speculation plays. Nowadays the stock exchange has transformed the laws of production: workers see their income decrease while the dividends of speculators and the premiums for CEOs increase in a shocking way. Let's then examine now how capital should be formed.

5) Capital: social capital

Social capital relies on community: consensus on priorities (ideal, support of all) and self-limitation (resilience, empowerment).

The first condition for a community to dispose on a rich capital is to develop and protect its own social vitality:

- 1) It has first to create a consensus about the main priorities and agree about the necessary conditions for reaching this common aim. Then members of the community have to revisit these aims

regularly and examine how well they succeeded in implementing the necessary conditions and limitations. Consensus cannot be dissociated from the need to favour equity over accumulation and growth, the defence of the poor and the weak over the privileges of the most wealthy, because consensus can only last if equality prevails.

- 2) The community has then to practise self-limitation in order to keep control over the conditions which on one hand allow this special quality of life rooted in equality and solidarity to thrive and which on the other hand allow the community to remain empowered in choosing a common future. This option requires evidently a relatively small size of community, a will for preserving diversity and a clear priority for human considerations over market pressure and materialistic aspirations.

I shall only mention here a few priorities:

- Social: defend the poor and the weak, care for each member, do what is possible to provide each one with a satisfying way to contribute to the common wealth (work, creative expression), preserve diversity and complementarity of members and activities.
- Economics: priority to core economy (subsistence), consume if possible what has been produced locally, stimulate diversity and complementarity in activities and trades, favour inner exchanges, avoid if possible exchanges converted into money, generalise the use of local money and bartering, develop voluntary work, finance local investment with local money, act in harmony with nature, care for the integration of all activities and exchanges into natural cycles.
- Politics: self-determination, social consensus, priority of public interest, authority of wisdom (of socially recognised wise people), empowerment of the local community, transparency of decisions,

visibility and readability of mechanisms, preservation of the commons (public space, common property, knowledge, etc.).

- And many other...

5) Capital: constitution by numbers

Capital (available accumulated financial means) should mainly arise through the law of numbers and be used in the present.

If no speculation is allowed and if no profit is accepted, capital as an accumulation of available financial means becomes almost impossible to collect except if it takes shape through the high number of contributors inside a given community. This is the law of numbers mentioned before. The many members of a community contribute to the constitution of the capital. It is what happens through the tax system; part of this budget will be allocated to common running costs and part will be allocated to investment works. Most investment works based on the law of numbers do not need to generate a debt as time is not a factor which can provide cash. Each year has its own needs and the fact of postponing the repayment does not bring any solution, except loading future generations with the expenses of yesterday. Yet, as we will see later, small credit is also necessary to make capital available for smaller earners.

As we will see, financing of capital through debt is an illusion which relays on greed and speculation: on one hand one succumbs to the greed of having immediately what one wants but one decides to postpone the responsibility of the payment onto further generations; on the other hand speculation is widely encouraged because it allows principal lenders (banks, financial institutions, private persons), who have usually a wide range of influence on political decisions, to cash in important amounts of interests. Technically the financing of

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investment through future debt does not provide any solution in comparison to financing it through past reserves. The fact that money is collected before instead of later will drastically change the way funds can be used. While the reserve constituted beforehand allows a community to have better control on what is available and to avoid uncontrolled charges for the future, debt implies for afterwards a huge cost to be generated by important charges of interest and compound interest, and leaves the problem of financing unsolved because simply postponed.

It seems at first sight normal that any investment, because it is a big expense whose object will be used for many years, should be financed by borrowed capital and paid back on many years. But it does not make sense: investments are more or less necessary every year and debt accumulates and constitutes a load for further younger generations who will have at the same time to cope with the past debt they will inherit from us as well as they will have to face their own needs for new investments. Debt is therefore more an illusion than a solution.

Each independent community has to create and maintain a common and permanent reserve which will allow the successive investments to be financed in the present, through the law of numbers, and not through speculation or debt which is profitable to only a few lenders and sucks the community dry of its running financial means because of the interests to be paid regularly. Taxes or contributions have to be calculated and adapted according to the current needs for investments. According to the principle of equity richer incomes and fortunes have to be taxed at a higher rate. The whole community has to be associated to the design of the budget according to clear priorities which have to be discussed publicly. This implementation of the social capital I described before and the practice of a

permanent democratic debate constitute the only way to make people aware of what is at stake, to train them to understand the different aspects of public finances, and to see clearly what is truly happening in their own community.

According to the law of numbers and immediate spending all expenses of community have to be financed in the present through the existing number of members. It is true for the running costs as for the social help including pensions and superannuation which have all to be financed in the present and not through the interests of risky investments. The present valid working people have to pay for the upkeep of the older and sick people of their local community. Such a clear way for democratic financing does not generate debt or false investments whose purposes would either not be defined by the utility of what they are used for or only be justified by the mere profit of a few lenders.

Financing capital through a reserve fed by the law of numbers will starve the market of need for lent money and allow a better control on fix interest rates I will describe later. Yet, as an exception to the law of immediacy, it can also be commonly agreed that major and exceptional investments - it means only very rare and particularly heavy ones which happen not more often than a few times in a century - should be exceptionally considered as extending over a longer period of time, yet at the maximum of a few years (for instance 5 or 10).

Now that I have clearly restricted what seems to be the necessary condition for accumulating capital, it is essential to bring an important restriction to this restriction. Evidently the problem of debt (and of budget deficit) is extremely complex and it is sure that the constitution of capital through credit is often a necessity for

governments, especially when it allows stimulating the local economy through public spending. This case is yet very different from the speculative games I try to describe here; it is not based on speculation or on illusion; it tries to bring more justice and fairness into local exchanges. Keynes and Roosevelt have shown very clearly, especially through the practice of the New Deal, how public spending can be a powerful stimulant that bring new opportunities to poorer workers, allows smaller incomes to become more consistent and to make them able to access necessary goods and, in this way, to stimulate useful activities.

5) Capital: debt as illusion

Credit has been extended to a wild extreme by the capitalist system to increase consumption as a base for profit; debt is not productive.

The accumulation of capital is in most cases made possible by big amounts of borrowed money or by profits generated by speculation on the differences of interest rates available on the market. When the law of numbers, which has been described before, does not work anymore to provide the basic goods necessary to everyone because social solidarity has been broken, individual accumulation or access to private credit and public subsidies are the two only possible remaining solutions for financing major projects. Yet debts are evidently acting as the destroying factor in our modern economy: on one hand important amounts of interest are extracted from social wealth and retained by the lenders, depriving therefore the market of this potential buying power and dynamic; on the other hand credits provide a morally unjustified profit for lenders despite the fact that no work, no service and no good has been provided. Credits generate in general an ever increasing deterioration of the financial situation of the borrower; the interest on interest (or compound interest)

condemns the borrower to pay ever bigger amounts which just pay the interests and never succeed to repay the capital, especially as interest rates have the tendency to increase when the situation of the borrower deteriorates, making the repayment of the debt more problematic. Compound interest loads heavily the prices of goods as the part of interests in the price tends to grow exponentially.

I have assessed before that financing capital through debt is not a viable solution for the reason it only postpones the problem. Debt is an illusion and the interest rate is a price paid for this illusion. The practice shows that this statement is true: total public debt has the general tendency to slowly increase through the years and to become excessive beyond control, generating a huge load in interests whose rate still increases when the debt becomes heavier. This mechanism of increasing debt becomes especially evident if one considers that any future time will also request its own use of capital to finance new investments and that there is no reason to postpone financing because tomorrow won't have more means than today and new needs will always arise in the future. The total debt can only increase to a point where it becomes impossible to be managed properly.

A strict control on interest rates, as we will see below, will certainly improve considerably the position of the borrower; yet it is the principle of lending as opportunity for profit which has to be condemned, as many philosophies or religions do when they forbid usury. Debt forces the borrower to pay a high price (high interests) for having access to what is in fact part of the common wealth. It is evident that accumulated financial means are part of the surplus of common economic activity and cannot be the property of private owners. Each time wealth is able to accumulate it does so only when exchange takes place, implying inevitably more than one person, and when this exchange is the opportunity for an unequal transfer of

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wealth, it means when part of the common value is unjustly retained by any of the actors.

In nature resources cannot be consumed before they are available. This is a basic rule we refuse to accept and therefore we exhaust nature capacities to maintain or even renew its ability to restore balance. This evidence should guide our use of borrowed capital in a way that consider what is truly available and what is truly needed for our subsistence; credit should be restricted only for poorer people as small credits, and not for larger state or corporation investments where the law of numbers should remain the rule. This would avoid or at least restrict larger actions of speculation on borrowed capital. It would also restrict the excesses of usual short term politics that rely on borrowed money and budget deficits used to protect or satisfy powerful private vested interests. The aim of such credit politic focused on small credits is to help poorer people to improve their situation and to reinforce in this way the practice of equity. It restricts speculation and want for easy profits which are the two harmful practices that destroy the health of subsistence economy.

An essential global rule remains fundamental for the practice of credit. It says:

- lenders are made responsible to ensure themselves that the project which justifies the credit is well prepared and sane,
- the conditions are just and equal,
- the borrower will for his own sake be able to repay quickly,
- the common good is preserved,
- the interest rates are linked with the living index.

Any illegitimate debt which would not answer these criteria should be immediately cancelled. This is probably the case for most of the debts of poor countries, which have been generated by credits that

have been contracted by corrupt governments or lenders, have served private interests and inadequate investments and have been increased but exaggerated amounts of compound interests.

5) Capital: control of interest rate

As speculation is one of the calamities of our times, the interest rate has to be severely controlled, made equal to the cost of living index.

Speculation is made possible by the fact that anybody who has access to important amounts of cash can borrow money at a certain rate and invest it at a more favourable rate, getting in this way a profit which is proportional to the sum which has been invested and which does not ensue out of any work, or service, or transformation but only out of parasitism.

As money can only keep its value if it is constantly active, one could argue that speculation, which has allowed the fortune of a few to arise, will eventually also allow later any kind of investment which will in a positive way concern a wider number of people. Nevertheless speculation is also what drains instantly the social network from its natural wealth when it puts salaries under pressure or appropriates itself part of the common wealth. It is then evidently more necessary to favour the control by the community on its own wealth than to favour the privileges of rich people in the hope that they will invest or generate activities, in the illusion that wealth could return to the community according to the “trickle down” principle.

The control of interest rates is therefore an essential tool for the control of investments and of transfers of wealth (movements of capital). Speculation (any play on differences of interest or exchange rates, stock exchange, exaggerated profits, retention of necessary

goods, benefits on sale values) has to be prevented if the local community intends to preserve the value of its common wealth and to keep it under its own control. The best way is to fix regionally and nationally a compulsory interest rate strictly equal to the cost of living index. This fix rate will maintain the practical value of the capital - whose buying power would not diminish but not increase either. It will also avoid the calculation of an interest on the interest (compound interest) which constitutes a very heavy charge for all; and essentially it will prevent speculation.

Controlled interest rates have to maintain the value of capital despite inflation and have to encourage people who have unused cash to invest it for the benefit of the community. Controlled rates constitute a kind of guarantee of value more than a reward for letting the community getting any profit from the use of these investments.

A controlled interest rate equal to the living index simultaneously allows the capital not to lose its value and prevents the lender from making any undue benefit. It is why this practice of control is compatible with the interdiction of usury.

The living index is a good reference because it will do nothing more than maintaining the purchasing power of the amount which is invested. Of course the prices of different items will evolve according to different rates. It is why the inflation rate of the household basket has to be considered as the main reference because the basket gathers what is most needed in everyday life and constitutes also the basics for what people will use frequently, especially if they are not wealthy. Living indexes vary from one region or country to the next and this simple difference still provides a possibility for speculation, yet in an incomparably much smaller way than it is presently the case in a system which officially encourages speculation as the best way

to become rich. Other regulations can also attempt to control the movements of capital.

5) Capital: access to financial means

Other collective forms of access to cash than debt have to be made possible: small credits, common investments, bartering, reciprocity.

If we agree that debt and speculation have to be discouraged because they provide ways of depriving the common wealth of an important part of its dynamic, possibilities for easy access to cash must yet be provided in order to allow families and small businesses to face their own needs for necessary short term investments and especially for redistribution of wealth and opportunities. I have described the constitution of capital by the law of numbers, i.e. by the direct support of the members of the community, whether through a system such as taxes or through a process of common decision by the community. Here are a few other means for making investment possible:

- 1) Although it is also a form of debt, small credit is a very good way for lending cash without the interest becoming a burden, as this interest is reduced to the minimum i.e. equal to living index and real costs for providing the credit.
- 2) When private ownership is no more the general rule, collective investments can take part in providing the necessary infrastructure for dwelling or for learning. This way of doing can only increase the common wealth; it means the access to this wealth will be made easier for all members.
- 3) Bartering of work, time, knowledge and goods can provide what is necessary without having to go through any exchange of cash.

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- 4) Relationships of reciprocity, where each one provides in turn what they can, will also contribute to provide the necessary creativity, energy and means for answering needs and making the actualisation of many projects possible.

These means come as an addition to the supply of capital by the community according to the law of numbers or by the slow creation of a reserve by the corporation to be affected to its own qualitative growth as I will describe it later:

- 1) **Small credit:** the Grameen Bank (created by Nobel Peace Prize Mohammed Yunus) in Bangladesh has practised a form of small credit offered to poor people, essentially women, on a minimum interest, with a proportion of repayment approaching 98% which is far beyond the proportion of repayment in usual banking. It shows that well adapted conditions of credit focused on small and efficient projects can allow even the poorest to have access to cash and to improve their possibilities for income. For this purpose banks must be collective institutions not aiming at profit but at social well-being, i.e. favouring the majority and preventing a minority from taking control or exploiting.
- 2) **Common investments:** the form of private property limits also considerably the possibilities for public money to be invested on private ground like for dwelling or health or learning. If houses are not systematically considered as private property but seen as means for common wellbeing, it allows the community to invest in dwelling and to provide a very precious infrastructure which can profit anybody, independently of ownership. The same for education or for health. As it has been explained before, access to the direct use of goods and services is more important than any title of property.

- 3) **Bartering:** if exchanges do not go necessarily through the use of money, and in this way avoid to undergo the competitive laws defined by the market, it makes it easier for people without access to cash to practise exchanges. Everybody can offer their own workforce or know-how or creativity against services of similar value, without exchanging money, or exchanging only local money which is like a means for accounting of the quantities being exchanged without converting these values into national currency. Bartering creates conditions for exchanges where generosity can be more easily practised than in conditions defined by market laws.
- 4) **Reciprocity:** reciprocity is an extension of bartering where the accounting is made more approximate because reciprocity relies more on the quality of the interdependent relationships it creates than on the value of what is exchanged. Any exchange of services or goods between members of the local community creates an obligation to return the same value through another service or good and stimulates the whole network of relationships inside the local community. Reciprocity stimulates also the reinvestment of common wealth into the local network and protects wealth from escaping or being appropriated by external or private interests.

5) Capital: growth as organic adaptation

Growth is not a fruit of speculation but a process of organic adaptation similar to our physical growth: it is qualitative and slow.

Growth is a fetish of our economic system. Without it life seems impossible. A growth of yearly 3% means that the size will double in 25 years; of 5% that it will double in 15 years, or will triple in 24 years. This is evidently not sustainable. Demography makes this kind of evolution still more irrelevant. The increase of population dictates

indeed the necessity to share the same resources between more numerous participants, i.e. we have to learn to reduce our impact on nature and not increase it. Growth is understood in our western society as a form of speculation that has to bring more profit on short term. Growth is thought in terms of investments that have to earn more. Debts have to make the fruits available before the season, and the price is usually left unpaid for our decedents. Debt does not exist in nature because an organic body cannot consume the resources it does not access.

But this pattern is evidently contrary to the laws of nature. Growth in nature is organic. A tree starts first to grow in size and in a second stage tends to diversify and to extend more slowly. As humans we do not grow constantly. How could we imagine doubling our size every 15 years? Growth is the characteristic of the first years of life until the body has established all its functions and abilities, then the growth is rather oriented inwardly. It becomes an inner transformation in terms of qualities and maturity. This natural and organic pattern of evolution should indeed inspire the pattern of maturation of any corporation. It means the corporation needs to create slowly a reserve in order to make this qualitative transformation possible. It is not a speculative investment, based on risky debts, but it is a slow potential for differentiation and focus on a more mature quality. Research and training, because they are qualitative factors, are two essential vectors of this organic form of mutation.

Investments based on debts are nothing else than speculation that tries to collect earlier the fruits of a growth that still did not happen. It is why debts are growing so quickly in our economic system: they satisfy the greed of the actors, the profit of the lenders, the hopes of the sellers, the will for power of the leaders. Yet many debts remain

often unpaid because many of these dreams collapse and do not take shape as foreseen; new necessities appear; more debts are sealed. Indeed evolution has to be financed by the law of numbers or by a constant effort of allowing this qualitative differentiation to happen. Let's examine how this reserve for growth can function.

- In first priority any corporation needs a margin of security. It has to constitute a buffer because its activities, expenses and incomes are not constant or regular. This reserve is an amount which does not need to be increased later, once it has been established. In fact it is only used to absorb shocks.
- Research is a main aspect of creative activity. If it is not financially rewarded, it is nevertheless a necessity for the contractor to improve his conditions of work, the way he is perceiving his activity and the variety and quality of what he is proposing, if not only for his own satisfaction and passion to invent new ways. Research is typically the kind of activity which is practised after hours, when the essential job has been done. It is also nourished by the activity of everyday life. In this way it does not load the cost of work due to subsistence, because it is done in the free time that Chayanov's law makes more consciously accessible, once subsistence is satisfied. Of course each field of activity has its own constraints and the research sector has a different meaning and role to play in each one. If knowledge remains truly a part of the commons and if it is not the means for profit or competition (as it is today the case in the pharmaceutical industry or in the agribusiness for instance), research can be shared with others. Interaction and cooperation make it more lively and richer, certainly also more efficient.
- Training is also an important part of the role of corporations. Like research it is an activity which is not pre-defined, still less by the constraints of transformation. It is more linked with the joy of

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sharing knowledge, taking the youngsters to the building site, or at different meetings in order for them to see more diversity and more aspects of the activity. In the vernacular pattern training is directly part of living in the community: seeing how one repairs a machine, milking the cow or drying fruits. Trades have today lost their visibility. A smaller size for corporations makes the impact of each worker more visible and more understandable for them and for the observer. This is an important factor for training. It is also one for the general satisfaction of workers and for their social recognition. Training is also evidently the responsibility of adults who are meant to enrich younger people of their own wisdom and to transmit the heritage of knowledge that they have themselves inherited from ancestors and that they have enriched in their own way.

- Flexibility and adaptability are also factors of growth as qualitative transformation. This requires a capacity for observation of what is necessary and imagination for the way to make it possible. Experience is the fruit of activity and each participant has its contribution to bring. Less hierarchical work structures and smaller corporation sizes have the advantage of making the participation of all easier and more personal. Competence is to be found at grassroot level because it is basically where experience happens.
- When corporations are better understood as a contribution to the wellbeing of all members in the community than as private enterprises, they allow the community to be a real partner. The law of numbers and the support of the collective good is an important help in finding what has to be done and to find the means to implement it. State subsidies in the present practice are nothing else than the practical expression of this reality.

Deprived of its speculative aspects, growth appears in this way more like a slow evolution and something that concerns the whole local community. It is evident that we need to get rid of our false representations of endless growth and to rediscover this simple path of adaptation. We have to integrate our activities into natural cycles, to care for the marginalised, to implement equity and justice, to reorient our activities from the purpose of accumulation to the purpose of human happiness shared by all. This is a long program that seems much more fascinating than just producing more.

6) Knowledge / commons: necessity for sharing

Knowledge has to be shared freely as part of the commons: shared knowledge multiplies instead of depriving the ones who share it.

This is a law we will examine later in more detail: except in basic educational institutions (public schools) knowledge is too often in our modern society the object of secrete ownership: corporations, scientific research, trade, industry. Patents consolidate this form of ownership in a legal form although most of our knowledge has been inherited from, or made possible by, our society in the form of education, tradition, religion, etc. On the opposite it is fascinating to observe that the sharing of knowledge does not deprive anybody but on the contrary stimulates more knowledge and creativity. Sharing equals multiplication, and not division. This statement calls for a free access to knowledge and a moral obligation to share whatever knowledge we have.

This is a temporary statement that I will develop later on. It is important to consider this aspect of knowledge among the bricks of economy because knowledge and education (as social capital) are the main fundaments of any social or economic activity. The principle of

general sharing which is already widely practised in public fields today has to extend to what is called the private sector and be understood as the most natural thing which ensues out of the fact that most of our resources and knowledge are provided to us free of charge as we saw it before. Knowledge is part of the commons; it is a basic resource everybody has a right to access freely.

6) Knowledge / commons: free access

The wealth of a community relies on the breadth, diversity and depth of its commons and how they are accessible for all members.

In vernacular societies the law of numbers provides all members with the necessary security when it keeps as common wealth, that remains accessible for all, the many goods and means that are necessary for survival and that are beyond individual capacity to acquire or manage: such as social solidarity, traditional wisdom, general knowledge, technical know-how, but also some invaluable material goods, especially the indivisible ones, such as natural resources, management of fragile natural balances, many parts of land, forests, rivers and common infrastructure, etc.

It seems to me that the wiser a society is the wider the range of its commons remains or becomes. Spiritually oriented communities have a tendency to have more in common while the materialist trends of our modern world encourage rather individual competition or accumulation at the cost of general wealth. Constant sharing does certainly not make life easier because it is also the opportunity for many conflicts that have to be solved on an everyday basis but it nevertheless provides essentially the conditions for equity and for a wider range of possibilities for many. As I explained before, when

wealth remains accessible to all and circulates it becomes profitable to more people and the whole community can thrive.

In our society today the tendency is to privatise the commons. Natural or social wealth and knowledge are included into corporation practices or into protected and restrictive patents; public infrastructure or wealth are used for individual profit; public academic research is converted into private profit while social charges and private deficits and destruction have to be taken over by public services (environment, social aid). This is what Marx called the privatisation of benefits and the socialisation of deficits.

One of the most explicit examples in this matter are the enclosures of the 14th and 15th century in England and of the 18th and 19th century in Scotland, when private landowners decided to enclose their land as paddocks for sheep grazing and to prevent local farmers from accessing natural resources such as wood and grass which had always been available there for them as a common wealth and which they had the right to access for their daily survival according to the rules of past feudalism.

Through the process of the enclosures the landowners changed deeply the nature of relationships between local people and land or between people themselves because:

- 1) they transformed a common wealth into a private exclusive property used for personal profit,
- 2) they evicted the local population from a vast land that locals were entitled to access and, by depriving them from their subsistence, transformed these people into potential wage-earning and dependent workers on whom the landowners could have better control,

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3) they transformed also the usual perception of nature, which used to be a common nourishing support for everybody's life, into a private resource and an available storage for goods and trade, destroying in this way the deeper meaning of linkage that the local place and land play in the life of its inhabitants.

It is interesting to see how much indeed the intention of these landlords was not only to appropriate themselves the land for private purposes but also to create the dependency of cheap workers who would become more reliable and provide inestimable sources of future profit. This mutation shows how much the right to access land is an essential link which constitutes the root for personal or familial independence and dignity. Commons are this same form of anchorage of the members of the local community in the local place.

The two following quotations⁸⁸ confirm here that the intention of landlords to spoil people from enough land to live on was a real and conscious plan in order to increase the available working force.

The first quotation concerns Scotland:

“Lord and Lady Stafford were pleased humanely to order a new arrangement of this Country. That the interior should be possessed by Cheviot (sheep) Shepherds and the people brought down to the coast and placed there in lots under the size of three arable acres, sufficient for the maintenance of an industrious family, but pinched enough to cause them turn their attention to the fishing (waged labour). I presume to say that the proprietors humanely ordered this arrangement because it surely was a most benevolent action, to put these barbarous hordes into a position where they could better associate together, apply to industry, educate their children, and advance in declination.” (*Patrick Sellar, factor for the Sutherland*

Estates, Scotland, 1815)

The second quotation concerns Kenya:

“So white settlers have set about 'civilizing' these people by destroying their tribal land system. They are taking the lands from the natives and wherever they have done so the result has been an abundant supply of 'labour on the market' with wages kept down by the competition of landless men, just as they are at home. This is confirmed by evidence given before the Native Labour Commission (Kenya) in 1912-13. Settler after settler came before the commission and demanded in the most precise terms that the natives should be forced out of 'Reserves' to work for wages by cutting down their land so that they should have less than they could live on. Lord Delamere himself owner of 150,000 acres, said: "If this policy is to be continued that every native is to be a landholder of a sufficient area on which to establish himself then the question of obtaining a satisfactory labour supply will never be settled". The process of reducing men to unemployment and poverty is here stated in all its nakedness and simplicity... In refusing land an 'adequate' supply of labour on the market would be guaranteed. (*A. R. Lester, Unemployment and the Land, 1936*)

As we will see later, the market becomes here a tool for destroying the social substance and making people more fragile and therefore more dependent and exploitable.

6) Knowledge / commons: the risk

Managing and preserving the commons is not easy; conflicts of interests arise, especially in the short term or because of privileges.

⁸⁸ Alistair McIntosh, in *Interculture 124* (Intercultural Institute of Montreal).

As common wealth the commons have to be managed democratically by the whole community; this is an evidence, yet not easy to actualise. They have to be preserved, to remain accessible for all and not to be exploited in the interest of a particular group more than another. Privileges and short term interests play a considerable role in the decisions that are taken for managing this form of wealth which remains permanently very fragile because exposed to be diverted by any group which could become more influent. No law, no regulation, no institution can solve the problem of clear-sightedness and maturity of the acting community; it can only be a process of awareness that has to be maintained constantly alive.

Two principles seem to be at the core of a collective management of the commons: their preservation in maintaining them integrated into natural cycles and the criteria of social equity which requires accessibility for all.

Forests are a good example how we usually fail to manage our commons in harmony with nature and in a spirit of equity: their exploitation is often sold as concession to private corporations which see only their short term interest in making profit without considering how these forests can be reconstituted in the same rhythm as they are exploited. They are in most cases exploited like mines; mining destroys the resource which cannot be replaced. When nothing is left, one moves on to the next deposit. On the other hand forests resources are rarely accessible to all people because they are considered as private property (private concession) although traditionally they have been the resources for all.

Nowadays the elites in power decide about the “correct” use of common resources. The will for power and profit encourages many practices which are harmful for commons. Yet they are often

accepted because we have completely lost the sense of what the commons are. We are no more aware of their tremendous potential and we accept without any afterthought the laws of power and profit that constitute the base of our present anthropology based on grabbing and accumulation (rape and run).

Community control over market

The local community has to keep control over economic and market relationships, in conformity with its own social project (consensus).

Instead of being based on the false belief that private profit will generate wealth for all, according to the illusory trickle down principle, this statement says that only a true care for public good and common wealth can create the true wealth which can be shared among all members of the community. Equality and care for the weakest are the true rules which govern this other way of perceiving the meaning of community welfare.

A few aspects of this statement can be mentioned here without any further development because a deeper description would necessitate many pages of explanations and a specialised knowledge I do not have:

- Priority to community well-being: the common good (human shared quality of life) is the true criteria and not the increase of capital nor the financial aspects. Prices and money do not represent the true value of life, but only life itself does.
- The care for diversity is essential: social diversity, whether cultural, ethnic, educational, religious, or diversity of activities, of trades, of knowledge, of age, or any similar form of contrast, is a

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priority in the same way as biodiversity is a priority for the maintenance of natural equilibrium and resilience.

- The choice for the small size: small is beautiful; it lets people see what is truly happening and how it works. The small size of businesses is the necessary condition for people to be valued and see what they have contributed to.
- Local self-sufficiency is not good if it is absolute because it deprives the community from exchanges with exterior actors, but when it remains relative it certainly stimulates the inner complementarity of actors and the diversity inside the local community that do not exclude a further external complementarity.
- The care for the protection and enhancement of the commons (common infrastructure, know-how, culture, vitality, consensus, solidarity, land, nature, built space, resources, anthropology, spirituality) helps the awareness of common destiny to implement better choices for the future; these better options will offer more opportunities for local creativity and for the expression of all.
- The capacity for consensus and self-limitation is an expression of maturity and of the awareness that what is not managed locally by consensus escapes local control and profits third and foreign interests.
- Social solidarity expresses itself through self-help inside the local community and sharing between members.
- The control of financial institutions like local banks and reserves allow a better management of choices and investments (not only financial but also what the community decides to focus its energy upon).
- The control of the movements of capital allows managing who has influence and how can be implemented, and especially what are, in a positive or restrictive way, the priorities and necessary conditions of local evolution.

- The creation of local employment possibilities must be directed according to the real needs of members and of the community, and not for profit or economic reasons. Work conditions have to be guided by human criteria more than functional ones.
- Priority must be given to core economy in order to answer basic needs more than secondary ones, basic health more than luxury treatments.
- Social security relies on the law of numbers in the present and may require a form of alliance with neighbour communities in order to reach the sufficient numbers.
- Local social money stimulates exchanges and relationships despite lack of access to cash. Exchanges are thus less submitted to the laws of market.

The magic law of economics

Privileging simple tools over products means privileging processes over results, human beings over objects, spirit over matter.

Vernacular societies have traditionally practised the use of simple and polyvalent tools because it is all what they had. Simple tools have the great advantage to be flexible and to offer possibilities for many different uses, for many people, across a wide range of creativity. They are also the expression of how the diversity of simple means can make these simple means more accessible for a wider range of persons. On the opposite, industrial societies concentrate on products, and favour concentration of highly specialised means into the hands of a few. In this context communities have the role of providing the widest possible range of means for personal expression to the widest possible range of people.

This is the magic law of economics which summarises what has been said in the previous pages: local and regional communities have to be socially strong and mature enough to privilege vernacular values over industrial values despite the fact that our means for transformation are the ones of an industrial society. It is evident, for our sake, for our mere survival but also for our happiness, that it is more efficient to behave according to the pattern of vernacular societies which privilege wider means for all, yet without denying the potential of the means and technology industrial development has made available as tools. The magic law is: act with industrial tools in the mentality of a vernacular community, according to the precepts of the new anthropology I have described previously, concerning the control of the community over market, as a guide for the social, ethical and spiritual choices of a common project.

This statement of a preference for vernacular values over technologic advances is of course a simplistic affirmation. It is where the need for a new anthropology (a meaning for our search of what is life) becomes the most evident as a guide in our choices and preferences. These preferences for human quality and for the implementation of spiritual values provide the key for most of our present challenges, from climate change to financial crisis, from injustice and violence to the need for equity and peace. This priority is simply the necessary key for true happiness. And why not be happy?

A new anthropology

The bricks of economy described here design a new anthropology based on human relationships, creativity, sharing, equality, caring.

We just examined in this chapter what I have called the bricks of economy, i.e. the components of our economic activities: work,

exchanges, subsistence, use of money, ownership, access to use, capital, debt, interests, knowledge, commons, growth. These elements of classic economy have been described here in a very different way from the one they are usually considered. They are not seen here as the cogs of an inhuman economic system but as the components of a fundamentally different understanding of the meaning of life: life in my description appears to be much more than the competition for grabbing and accumulating; life is perceived here as a mysterious experience whose material aspects are only a side aspects. A new (or old) anthropology arises (again) slowly which proposes higher aims grounded on human values. On this new (or old) fundament we can rebuild a new economic system because the premises are now right (at least I believe they are!). My present proposal is truly built on a new anthropological approach. It offers a new start. The new economics I propose here are not the desperate attempt to get control of a mad machine and to fix it despite the deep contradictions that it contains, but it is a new perspective, or at least a different one. We know very well by experience that a system that is based on wrong premises cannot be fixed in the same logic. As Einstein put it, a problem cannot be fixed by the mentality that generated it; only another approach, i.e. another mentality or way of thinking, can offer solutions. The different approach I propose here is based on an anthropology, i.e. an understanding of the meaning of life, that is fundamentally different: an anthropology of respect of differences, of fascination for diversity, of care for the others, of awareness of how much we are all interdependent; an anthropology that integrates into the cycles of nature and receives, and cares for, what nature provides freely; an anthropology that values the art of being more than doing and having; an anthropology that sees our living together as the frame for our cooperation and rich exchanges, on whatever level they happen, whether material, social, emotional, intellectual, artistic or spiritual.

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We will come back to this anthropology later, because it is the backbone of a new vision for our economic activities. Yet we can summarise this anthropology in a few words.

The law of gratuity and gratitude

The new anthropology can be summarised by the word “gratuity”: the marvel or gratitude for what is given at each instant of our life.

Incapable to marvel at the existing harmony and given gratuity, the culture of our western society has chosen to base its own logic on the inversion of this meaning of life. Instead of wondering for the miracle of gratuity, it teaches: each of us is in a war with the neighbour and has to extract from the natural surroundings (i.e. the resources and sources of life) or from the social network (i.e. the other human beings) his own wealth through violence, at the certain risk of destroying both nature and society. Survival is described in this way as a war against nature and against our fellow human beings, although everything is abundantly given and can be only enjoyed if we experience it in a spirit of wonder and solidary sharing. We will see soon how our market's culture succeeds by this deep inversion to corrupt the subtle meaning of life.

Gratuity and gratitude are the two legs of the new anthropology based on human values. The spirit of cooperation and solidarity as well as the art of free receiving, free sharing and free giving, which constitute the core of our private life in our families, neighbourhood and with our friends, become the basic reference for organising our social relationships, because we know that we are all interdependent and form one humanity. Human relationships are the substance of our lives; the special quality we try to find in them has to define our

priorities and to shape the way we interact with people and with the material aspects of our life. And not the other way. Culture has to shape the economy. Nowadays it is sadly the contrary that happens. This new anthropology is grounded in our power for creativity and poetry. This is a healthier base than money.

So far I won't develop this idea further because we will come back later to this fundamental move towards change. Before we do so, I will examine now in the next chapter the nature of our present exchanges, ruled by market economy and based on the value and the power (illusion) of money and show how market generates a deep inversion of the true understanding of life.

3) MONEY AND MARKET

After describing the nature of the basic elements of economy, it is essential to see how they have been corrupted and turned into something else, when they have been diverted from their true purpose in order to become tools for individualistic purposes, exploitation and private profit. Money and market, and of course the passion we develop for them, are the principle powers that crystallised this transformation of human relationships.

The twist of money

Kinship or money

In the West money and market replace kinship relationships; the market regulates each human link (exchange) as a closed entity.

In traditional societies relationships are regulated by kinship and social rules before they are determined by purely economic factors. Of course the many material aspects of life influence deeply these kinship relationships, but these relationships are nevertheless not reduced to simple exchanges. When money becomes the support for all forms of values the manifold aspects of life cannot be expressed and the social network is drastically impoverished.

The statement that money, in our market society, has replaced traditional kinship relationships is from the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. Human relationships are evidently something very complex which necessitates all possible forms of expression to be complete and creative. When they have to be reduced to the simplest form of material exchange and to a chain of simple exchanges of cash against

goods or services, according to market laws, they lose evidently most of their consistency and meaning. It is hard to understand how subtle interactions which involve know-how, intelligence, feelings, emotions, creativity, gifts, beliefs, etc. can be reduced to such a poor yardstick as money.

In our modern society we believe that economic exchanges are the basic of social life and that money is the only and necessary means to regulate these exchanges; yet anthropologists have shown that it is not the case in so many traditional societies; exchanges are not always measured in a precise ways. As I have explained before, the principle of traditional reciprocity does not compensate each exchange separately but creates an obligation to give back in a near future the value that has been offered. As a consequence of this never ending process, successive imbalances, created by successive exchanges, call for more future exchanges because each new exchange creates a new state of obligation which never comes to an end. Reciprocity is in this sense a continuous process that never exhausts the potential of communication but calls for more complete and diverse ways of relating. On the opposite market laws consider each exchange as a closed matter; the payment itself means the end of the relationship which will have therefore no continuation.

In order to better understand how market laws transform our human relationships it is important to examine how money impacts on our exchanges and how the laws of market have transformed our society.

Let's start at the origin of the use of money, with the bartering system.

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Barter as a global exchange

Despite their unequal values, undivided goods can be bartered because the exchange satisfies the basic needs of both actors.

Barter has been the first form of exchange to be practised since the origin of times. One offers what one has in (relative) surplus against what one needs and what the other has in (relative) surplus. It requires two people and two goods, or strings of goods, of subjective more or less equal values which are available at the same time. Each one estimates in one's own personal way whether the acquisition of the other good is worth letting go of the good one has. Need and abundance are measured subjectively. Goods usually cannot be divided and the exchange is generally global, although it may be composed by many items.

It is interesting to consider that the need of each one is considered in a very subjective way because of the limitation of the offer. Each one has to find someone who wants to get the good one has and at the same time can provide the good one wants. There is little game for playing on values because facts are very constraining. In principle there are only two people and two terms (the two goods or strings of goods) involved.

In barter one has tendency to undervalue the good one has to give away, because it is already superfluous, and one has tendency to overvalue the good to be acquired, because it is answering a real need. Parties in barter tend for this reason to be more generous and flexible than in exchanges involving money.

Money as an intermediary

In sales money introduces a third term as intermediary support requiring successive translations of values into a neutral yardstick.

In sales there are no more two terms (two goods to be directly exchanged) like in barter but three terms because money serves as an intermediary support for transfer of value, and the two goods to be exchanged are no more linked one with another because each one can be translated into cash instead of being exchanged one against the other. This multiplies the possibilities for exchanges because the person who needs the good on offer does not have any more to be the same as the one who provides the other good on demand. This originally one same person can indeed be two different people. Each good has its respective value translated into an amount of money as intermediary support of value for transfer. This implies the measure and conversion of the value of each good according to a conventional yardstick (the currency). This double conversion opens of course the way for all kinds of speculations.

In comparison with barter, the practice of sale presents three advantages:

- 1) It multiplies the number of people who are susceptible to acquire the good offered because they have only to pay for the good and do not have to provide an attractive good in exchange. This means more possibilities and a wider competition.
- 2) It allows subdividing goods: I do not need to exchange a whole ox in one go, but can give away only the equivalent in money of one or two parts of it. One can play on quantities.
- 3) It allows an easy transport of value as cash: I can put my ox in my pocket.

Money as such, as a means to facilitate and subdivide exchange and to transport value, should remain neutral and without any special power. Yet it is not the case; it opens the doors for all excesses.

The 4 temptations of money

Money as an intermediary support of value stimulates tendencies for speculation, sense of ownership, competition and exclusion.

Money is indeed more than the temporary support for value it should be. Its use offers many other possibilities which corrupt its purpose and make it attractive as such, for its own power, beyond what it can allow to buy or provide. We can describe four main tendencies the use of money encourages:

- 1) The introduction of the third term (money) as intermediary value for transfer allows dissociating the respective evaluations of value of different items and allows more room for play on value. Speculation becomes the key for a play between two different evaluations.
- 2) The conversion of each item into an amount of money becomes the central focus of the exchange instead of aiming at the satisfaction of each actor. The sale process, because it focuses on price and profit, disregards the factor of satisfaction which should arise from the exchange for all actors. On the contrary it reinforces the sense of individual ownership and rivalry (me against you).
- 3) The dissociation of the successive stages of the exchange makes it simpler and poorer, with less density of human factors. It creates more distance between the actors. The desire for speculation generates competition: all potential actors are considered in the same equal and indifferent way without

emotional or personal preference. The goods and the possibilities for profit become more important than the persons of the actors. For material purposes one plays actors against actors to get more goods or profit. Competition replaces cooperation.

- 4) The use of money as an intermediary means for exchanges makes exchange only available for people who have access to money. Money becomes the exclusive key which allows to access market, goods and services; it means, in our western society, most of what is necessary for surviving. The reduced possibility for so many people to access money generates their exclusion.

Let's see in more detail.

- 1) Speculation as a play on the difference between two evaluations: in barter there is an evaluation on each side of what each good is worth. In sale this process of evaluation is doubled because it happens in two distinct stages: first the conversion of value of the first good (the one to be given away) into money and then the conversion of money into a second good (the one to be acquired). In barter these two evaluations happen at the same time and try to converge towards the possibility of exchanging the goods. As it has been described, each actor has the tendency to value more the good of the other, because it is what he needs and wants to acquire, than his own good, because it is what he does not need and wants to give away. In sale each actor tries to do exactly the contrary when each one tries to overestimate the value of what he is selling because it will increase the quantity of money he gets for it, and to disregard the value of what he wants to buy although the true value in his eyes has not changed. This strategy is only a game in order to get more for oneself out of the exchange.
- 2) Reinforcement of the sense of individual ownership: in barter the operation is global, because both actors have interest to make the

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exchange possible. The process is a collective one which emphasises the role of community and interdependence. In sale each actor acts for their own interest against the interest of the other. The distinction between the two goods increases: this is mine, this is yours. If you do not accept my conditions, I go elsewhere and ask someone else. The process is split into many individual and egocentric acts.

- 3) The game of competition: in barter a compromise has to be found because of the narrower possibilities for agreement. The factor of global satisfaction remains central, beyond the value of the goods. In barter people have more time than money. It creates social links. The conditions for barter are more complex because they involve more aspects and require compromise in the purpose of succeeding. The negotiation involves all human characteristics of each actors and emphasises the pleasure of interaction. When goods and profit become more important than people, the social network splits in many particles which are opposed to one another. It creates competition and conflict, and weakens social coherence.
- 4) The effect of exclusion: as market exchange is only possible if one has money, all goods become available only to people who have access to cash. This can seem normal to everybody who is normally integrated into the normal network of daily exchanges with a paid job; it means an income in cash. Yet many people can be productive without getting money for what they produce: housewives or husbands, older people, children, handicapped, unemployed, relatively self-sufficient farmers, etc. The exclusive key of money becomes for them an insurmountable obstacle and they become marginalized.

The 3 fundamental illusions about money

The use of money is based on 3 conventions (forms of trust): unlimited conversion, universal yardstick, ability to buy anything.

If it were not the most oppressing and violent system we know, money should be declared the most idealistic one because it is based essentially on trust. This seems to be the highest possible paradox! Without trust there is no money. Money is a convention which works only when everybody respects it. I can only buy my food at the supermarket because they recognise the value of the money I give them and because they trust they will be able to buy some more goods for this amount, using the same banknotes or coins. Money is not only based on a convention of trust, it is also based on three assumptions which are in fact illusions:

- 1) The first illusion is the capacity of money to become the converted value and the refuge of value of anything which exists. It means that any good which may be used or traded can be converted into an amount of money. It seems the most incredible thing: basic resources which are unique and essential for our surviving, like food or shelter, can be bought by - exchanged with - a metal (silver or gold) which cannot be eaten, or even which would not have any value if it could not be converted into goods. Yet this metal, or its replacement by bank notes or credit cards, has only value because we accept it as a value; if not it would be like sand.
- 2) The second illusion is the capacity of money to become a yardstick for measuring all the possible values. It is believed that anything has a precise value which can be measured by the price which is falsely understood as the conversion of value of each possible good according to the local currency. One measures distances in meters or kilometres and, in a similar way, values in

dollars, rupees or euros. Yet values vary according to people, places, customs, needs, circumstances, beliefs. And the yardstick of money is not applicable to the unlimited quantity of the many goods which are not available on the market, like human life, justice, love, beauty, silence, peace, quality of the environment.

- 3) The third illusion is the capacity of money to buy anything which can be needed. It is believed that anybody who has money has access to anything which exists because of the illusion of conversion explained above and because of the power that money is believed to provide. Any essential need (bread, water, dwelling, education, etc.) is able to be satisfied by means that can be bought with money and everything can be bought, depending on the price one is ready to pay. Yet money can buy only what people are ready to let go for money. It depends evidently on their belief in money and how much they accept this value as central in their life. But mainly it depends on the power they are submitted to for getting their subsistence or selling their workforce.

These three illusions are absolutely necessary to give consistency to the system of monetary exchanges. Without a wide acceptance of these illusions the system would collapse immediately. And it is a real enigma how it can survive, because these illusions are not even well hidden but never stop to become apparent at many occasions:

- 1) About the conversion of money: Tahca Ushte, an Amerindian healer⁹, tells the story of a battle of Sioux and allied tribes against, and victory over, General Custer and describes how the children after the battle were playing with the dollar bank notes they had found on the ground, folding them into animal figures and letting them fly into the wind. What had been the dreadful reason for the battle (greed) finished as a meaningless accessory for leisure

despite the infinite suffering and the high number of dead. With humour Tahca Ushte calls the American green dollar notes the green frog's skin. It shows how a different scale of values reveals the deep illusion on which money is based when money is no more accepted as representing core values.

- 2) About the use of money as yardstick: When one travels to another country, one needs a few days to get accustomed to the new currency, sometimes under- or over-evaluating the value of prices by ten or even hundred times. It shows how this system of measure is abstract and changeable, because value is not identical to price and a true value never stops varying and cannot be measured.
- 3) About the power of buying: I can pay my doctor or my architect to do what is good for me, yet I do not possess so far health or beauty they provide: I make it only possible for them to spend time and give attention for my concern. Even if I buy a Van Gogh, what do I get? I am maybe in material control of the object but I do not own the beauty the painting makes me feel and I do not acquire the skills of its author. What do I get that I would not get in a museum where this painting would remain available to all? and if the painting were exposed in a museum, it would mean that nobody would be deprived, not even myself.

These illusions I described do not mean we have to do without any money. It just shows how much we must be aware of its influence on our behaviour and our relationships. This influence depends on the way we look at the role and value of money; it means that our way to look at it is able to change the use we make of it. Of course the more independent we are from its use, its power and its force of oppression, the freer we become to change our mind and our behaviour. And the reverse is probably also true: the freer we become, the less we will be submitted to its power.

⁹ Tahca Ushte (John Fire / Lame Deer) and Richard Edroes: *Lam Deer Seeker of Visions*. 1972.

Market and motivation

I have described so far how money has changed our human relationships. The market is the place or institution which regulates our exchanges. It is mind blowing to examine how the market, because of this power of money, generates deep inversions in our understanding of the meaning of life and our behaviour. It is what I intend to describe in this chapter. But, before we examine the nature of market, it is necessary to make clear what I mean by market, because there are different types of market.

Let's describe very simply what I mean by market and how it relates to the different forms of market I will make distinct. I do not have the necessary knowledge to describe these different forms in a complete way. It is why my description will be reduced to a minimum in order to avoid later misunderstandings but yet it is necessary that I introduce here the minimal notions I need for further developments.

Market economy and local market

Market economy is the so called self-regulating force between offer and demand that has little to do with what we call the local market.

We know very well by own personal experience what a market place is. It is the main square in the local town where principally local products are exchanged. Exchanges on the local market place happen because of the limitation of the possible degree of self-sufficiency for the local producers and because of the specialisation and complementarity of trades that ensues out of this limitation. The local grower for instance brings the products of his garden, orchard or

fields and sells them on the market place in order to get the money he needs to acquire what he does not produce himself and yet needs, like for instance salt, sugar, fuel, clothes, shoes, tools, machines, industrial goods, repairs, or other goods, services or resources. It is important to see that the first and main purpose for such activity and exchange is not the accumulation of more wealth but the more or less elementary satisfaction of basic needs. Money and profit do not provide here the main motivation for the exchange. Of course this does not mean that the local grower does not expect also to get a good income out of his transactions.

On the other hand, what we call in short “market” or more precisely “market economy” is very different from the market place. It is not so much a place where exchange happens, but an institution that regulates the mechanisms of prices at which services and goods are exchanged. Free market economy believes (wrongly!) in the self-regulating capacity of this institution which is meant to adapt automatically the prices for all exchanges and to create the best conditions for exchanges. Basically, when the demand is strong, the price of goods and services increases; when it is weak, the price decreases. Many means of speculation can affect these mechanisms, like for instance storage of resources, transport, destruction of goods, monopolies, etc. Indeed the market is not self-regulating and the experience shows that an important row of regulations is necessary to protect society from the excesses and destructions that free market would generate. By contrast with the market place, market economy is motivated mainly by the hope for profit. The conversion of a good into an amount of money is not considered as a pure practicality as it is on the local market place (to be able to put one's ox into one's pocket) but as a way to speculate on the value of things and on the range of possible conversions, and get the maximum profit out of the exchange.

The description I have made here of the market place seems of course a bit simplistic, but it is mainly what it was at its origin. The purpose of the local market place has always been to provide the necessary complements for one's subsistence, as total self-sufficiency is almost impossible in our world, especially if one wishes to access a diverse range of goods which make life easier and richer, although they are not all absolutely necessary.

Local market places, and with them the small towns which used to shelter them, have developed because specialisation soon has been growing progressively in regard of the possibilities of exchanges that complementarity could provide. A great diversity of goods could be made accessible which one would not have access to by one's own means. This form of complementarity has been the main cause for the development of small medieval towns, precisely because of and around their market place. Diverse handicrafts could find a field for their activity, like the blacksmith, the shoemaker, or later the physician, the pharmacist and the lawyer. The local country town has always been the place where specialised services, needed for everyday life, were provided. The local market has made the development of complementarity possible, and a diversified and richer social body could take shape by the enhancement of the total variety and quality of the additive skills found in the local community.

As I wrote earlier, when exchange takes place on the market place, it is mainly the need for specialised goods and services which is the motivation for the exchange and not the profit. The market place ensues out of the necessary complementarity of resources, skills and trades, and not as a place for profit. Despite this basic consideration,

it is evident that the laws of market economy have also an impact on the local market.

Market economy seems fundamentally different from the local market because its proper aim is precisely to play on the different possible values of goods and services, in organising at its best transport, storage, promotion of sales, etc. It is why it is worth trying to show what makes market economy so different from a place where basic needs are answered.

Before we do this a last remark: market economy is more similar to a third form of market I did not mention, because it is outside the field of our present interest, i.e. the international trade which has been existing already very long ago, much before the industrial revolution, already at the time of the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Venetians, the Genoans, the Hansa cities, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, the British Empire, etc. The objects of this form of trade were as diverse as silk, spices, gold, wood, cloth, tropical products and even slaves. This kind of trades was evidently motivated more by the want for profit than by absolute necessity. It made profit possible out of the differences of prices or value in different places, out of the prestige these goods could provide, out of taste or fashion, out of boredom or luxury, etc. But international trade remained in the past outside the field we consider as it did not impact so strongly on the local market. In medieval times the local market was not invaded by this kind of products and remained therefore free from the influence of this form of trade. Except of course for very special trading cities like Bruges, Venice, Lubeck and similar. Nowadays international trade is hard to distinguish from what I have called here market economy.

Now let's examine what makes market economy so different from the market place. It is mainly because market is motivated by something

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which has little to do with satisfying basic needs, and more with pure speculation and profit, whose possibilities ensue out of overabundance and overproduction.

Machines and overproduction

At the industrial revolution when machines allowed producing more than needed, our society was deeply affected in its structure.

The industrial revolution brought fascinating inventions to life, especially in allowing an incomparable increase of production through the use of new forms of energy and the invention of new powerful machines. This deep transformation of industrial processes allowed multiplying the quantity of goods produced in an incredible proportion and this form of overproduction had to call for new ways of selling that reshaped completely the wider market. The sale of these products could play not only on the huge quantity of goods produced but also on a more favourable ratio between production costs and sale incomes, allowing in this way a larger benefice. All the elements of the chain of production of these goods became components of the calculation of the final sale price: the necessary natural resources, the workforce (labour) these resources needed to be transformed, the infrastructure (buildings, machines) for the mechanical transformation of materials, the land for the settlement of the activity of transformation, the capital for the investments needed for all these different purposes.

Not only the technical and economic transformations created new ways of production and new forms of market, but it also transformed deeply the society itself by the way it transformed components of life like nature (resources and land), work (human life) and capital (accumulated amounts of money and power) into simple material

goods which had a price, and were treated as simple material values on the market, in the same way as the goods themselves were.

The industrial revolution has been a time of powerful invention and improvement of technology that reshaped completely our world and modern society. In a simplified way we can describe three main transformations which affected deeply our modern society at that time¹⁰:

- 1) The first transformation is evidently the invention of new machines using new forms of energy such as coal, gas, electricity, and especially steam. Steam was driving spinning mills, weaving looms or trains. This new power allowed a fundamental increase in production.
- 2) The second transformation is the mutation in the structure of the market – the term “market” to be understood here in the sense of an institution which regulates relationships between people. Not only the market increased its impact on the prices for the exchange of goods, because of the tremendous increase in quantities - which it already did before, although in a much lesser and more flexible way - but it started also controlling under the laws of free market all the components necessary for production, such as natural resources, work, equipment, land and even capital. These values were not originally considered as goods one could exchange for a given price because they concerned values which were inherent to life. The power of free market provoked this tremendous and violent transformation which consisted in integrating these precious aspects of human life into the prosaic trade of goods, and in converting those into simple objects for profit only, disregarding all other dimensions of what they could mean from the human point of view. It is why this transformation

¹⁰ This description is inspired by Karl Polanyi: *The Great Transformation*, 1944.

had such an impact on the general structure of society and on the way of life of people. It condemned first the poorest part of the population (the workers) to true misery and starvation, while it allowed richer people to become richer and richer, despite the surrounding misery. It gave rise to a middle class of people who had the possibility, because of their personal wealth and the new opportunities the market was offering, to accumulate more wealth, not through their work but essentially through their investments or their skills for selling at a higher rate which provided good profit.

- 3) The third transformation is the almost simultaneous if not even preventive trend of society to protect itself and its poorest classes in trying to moderate the destructive effects of market by different forms of regulations and means of help for the most deprived of its members, such as the law of Speenhamland as early as 1795 and the Poor law in England. It is interesting to note that even before the industrial revolution and the free market system could develop to their full power, the society had already institutionalised a form of social control onto the market. On one hand it would implement through regulation a form of minimal protection against the destructive power of market laws which were to attack the essence itself of the social substance. On the other hand it would organise forms of social help which would compensate, at social expenses, for the suffering and harm an unrestrained want for private profit would cause to the social body, especially to the most vulnerable of its members, if not to an important part of the population. Instinctively, even before the impact of the new market system became clear in the awareness of people, the social body knew that economy needed to remain under social control if one wanted to avoid that the market imposed its laws onto life.

The situation today with a strong trend towards globalisation and open competition is not very different from what I just described. Overproduction remains today the principal tool for growth. Given the difficulties to convince people to buy more than they need and more than they can afford, different forms of easy credit have been made available in order to stimulate consumption and all means for advertisement seem to be possible. The necessity of publicity for selling the overstock is a proof of the aberration of this production system aimed at profit. Needs for true qualitative subsistence should be the only leading force which would foster needs and consumption.

The three transformations I just described created the new conditions of this new institution which I will call simply “market”. By “market” I will mean this institutional mechanism which transforms any material item and even any aspect of life item into an object which has a price, it means a possible conversion into an amount of money. This conversion, motivated by profit, ignores the negative impact, at a less material level, of what it generates for our quality of life. The motivation for economic activity is poorly reduced to only making profit.

Overproduction and hyper competition

Because it allows producing excesses, overproduction transforms deeply our needs and becomes the new leader of market economy.

In traditional societies resources are limited as well as the means to exploit them because these resources depend not only on the simple tools that are available but essentially also on the time and energy that are necessary to transform them into goods that can satisfy our basic needs. As energy is mainly produced by organic sources (human and animal energy), it is only available in a limited quantity;

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it means that an important effort and amount of time are needed to achieve anything. There is in this way a form of natural self-regulation: the importance of the required effort participates in limiting the amplitude of the needs which are kept to their minimum.

When new forms of energy and machinery have been discovered in the 19th century, this fragile balance between efforts and needs has been broken. Since the industrial revolution the production system has been able to generate vast quantities of goods and this quantity tends to develop ever more, much beyond the generally basic needs that had been satisfied so far. The overflow of goods requires then new market strategies in order to sell this superfluous quantity on the market. The surpluses, and not the needs, become in this way the constraint to reorganise consumption. That means that the priority is not to satisfy basic needs but to find outlets for surpluses. Not only one has to sell them (get rid of them) if one wants to recover the funds that have been invested in their production but these surpluses represent also the source of potential profit that is hoped for and has justified their production. The market has to grow and expand consequently in order to allow the outlet to be consumed without dumping of sale prices and the success of this new extension of market reinforces then the hopes for more profit. The system is condemned to an unending growth.

According to common sense, production should just be adapted to the needs. It is what happens more or less naturally locally when the local production has to satisfy the local needs, i.e. production cannot exceed what can be consumed locally and there is a form of natural balance that can be found in a very pragmatic way. When the local market is saturated, one needs to use publicity to create new desires and consequently new needs that are indeed artificial because they are not felt naturally by people but they are stimulated by artificial

means such as advertisements based on the exacerbation of pride, desire to be admired or simply fashion. When the local market is saturated, even after stimulating false needs, credit can enhance the consumption power of local population. It is how credit cards have developed so much in the last decades: they allow more consumption, i.e. a better outlet of surpluses. It is nevertheless evident that the improvement of outlets will generate an increased quantity of surpluses. This is a vicious circle.

When the local market has been exploited to its extreme limits, exports offer further outlets. It is sure that the more one extends beyond the limits of local market the more competition will develop. Competition requires the dumping of sale prices as it is based essentially on offering apparently more favourable conditions. Quality remains hidden but prices are the most visible aspect of a product when it comes to choice, and it is a fact that consumers seem to choose the product they buy mainly according criteria linked with the price. They prefer in general to buy bad quality at a cheap rate than better quality at a higher price. The expansion of market combined with competition generates therefore a huge pressure on the costs of production in order to liberate profit despite reduced sale prices. The most squeezable factor among all factors of production costs seems to be the salaries as workers are also in competition to get a job and the extension of market caused by overproduction forces them to accept reduced conditions if they do not want to remain unemployed. Unemployment becomes in this way a necessary condition for the extension of market and for the development of overproduction. It is then a vicious circle as the development of overproduction needs the extension of market, i.e. globalisation, as well as unemployment. This means that the further globalisation develops, the further basic needs (basic goods and work) are far from

being satisfied. Hyper competition goes hand in hand with overproduction.

Overproduction means also great quantities of goods. The profit on each of them is reduced to a minimum, as the sale price has also to be reduced, but the quantities never stop increasing, according to the trend of overproduction extension. Most of profit is then precisely made possible by the large number of items. It is more profitable to earn little on a huge quantity than more on a smaller quantity of goods. This reduction of profit by item is the basic principle of globalisation. It generates then delocalisation of production, unemployment, bad quality, exploitation of natural resources by waste of material, non-respect of the laws of nature and finally the negation of all human values attached to life, creativity, respect, love, etc.

Because it is more and more detached from real needs, overproduction transforms the economy in a large field of speculation, where one plays with the prices of everything, including the life of people involved. In our present time there is a clear evolution from industrial production toward financial speculation. It means it becomes ever easier to make more money by speculative means and wealth earned from financial speculation is ever more an important part of what they measure as GNP that is the (indeed falsified) measure for national wealth. The stock exchange develops and stakeholders are considered more and more as the main actors of wealth creation, although they are just parasites. This other evolution - that is linked with overproduction in the way both are based on speculation - participates to increase the pressure on work and life conditions and combines with globalisation in the same way that both generate more delocalisation, more unemployment, worse salaries,

worse quality of goods, less respect of sustainability, more exploitation and less equity.

This need for infinite growth and extension is evidently mad and leads nowhere. Where is the gain indeed?

The 3 kinds of motivation for economic activity

Our motivations for economic activity can be 1) subsistence, 2) social link, recognition, personal expression or creativity, 3) profit.

Economic activities include our acts and attitudes that relate to our natural or social surroundings and allow us to survive and improve our conditions of life. If we observe the nature of what motivates people for undertaking such economic activity, it seems to me that we may distinguish three categories of motivation:

- 1) Subsistence concerns elementary needs such as food, clothes, housing, etc. But it encompasses much more than the just material aspects of surviving. It includes all necessary aspects of a balanced life on material, physical, affective, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels. We all need more than food and shelter. We need education, social justice, respect, recognition, love, and so many other qualities.
- 2) The second category of motivation, which is narrowly linked to the precedent, concerns our link with our social surroundings. We need first social respect and recognition because we live in a social context into which we need to integrate and find our place. I believe that most of our work effort tends indeed more towards the creation of social link and the need for social recognition than towards the earning of an income, even if this remains a necessity. Once we are clear about this need for social link and

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recognition, we can better orientate our efforts towards what brings us happiness.

- 3) The third category is very different from the two previous ones because it means an extreme impoverishment of life in the way it reduces life to the single aim of accumulating goods and material wealth. This is what I call the motivation for profit.

It is good to make these three concepts a little more precise:

- 1) About subsistence: The search for the right means of subsistence not only includes these different aspects of our material, emotive or spiritual life conditions but also it implies the care to find the right level of satisfaction, or in other words to recognise the right level of need. Happiness is not about quantity; it is about the choice of the right quality and the right values; and it is especially also about the choice of self-restriction. It searches for the adequate level of effort motivated by the right choice. Subsistence in this case becomes a philosophy or, even better, a spiritual path.
- 2) About the creation of social link and social recognition: most of what is called shadow work is in fact motivated by the need for social acceptance and by the love for our nearest and dearest, family, friends and neighbours. We are very much involved in giving our time, sharing our effort, our skills freely. Volunteer work relies on this quality of social link and recognition for what one provides generously. This need for social recognition can even reach extremes when it tends to impose a form of dominating social status by an excess of exhibition of one's own generosity in order to be loved and admired, as we will see later.
- 3) About profit: It is important to understand that the motivation for profit is very different from the care of running successfully one's own business. A healthy business is not motivated by profit. It is organised to provide healthy work conditions and possibilities for

personal expression and to provide good quality goods or services for the clients one wants to be satisfied. This special care for quality business is more similar to what I have described as the creation of social link and social recognition. On the opposite, when profit becomes the dominant factor for motivation, it empties life of its content and aims at an illusion. The accumulation of wealth for no purpose except itself is usually a compensation for an empty life. It is amazing to observe how we tend towards this type of behaviour each time we feel empty or insecure: consuming, eating, drinking, being passive and looking for any form of comfort which can be given to us without effort, without our own share in creation.

In summary we have, on one hand, social motivations which tend to improve personal satisfaction and the quality of social links and, on the other hand, we have the want for profit which is the main force that leads the market I will describe further on, in a form of caricature.

Market against culture

When the market regulates relationships between people, it destroys the density and depth of the social links they have established.

Before the market starts to regulate its dynamic or beside what happens under the influence of market, any society is fostering an important, deep and complex network of relationships between people. These relationships are always including all the components of necessary economic activities although they are not based on money exchanges. Even on the local market place the exchanges are much more than just making money. People talk, laugh and enjoy the contact. They share their skills and care for each other, or need to be

respected and appreciated. This provides indeed more the substance of life than of economic activity, although more or less basic needs are often the principal reasons why all this happens. Beyond the material exchanges any local community has its own treasure in many forms of relationships which are far from being all included in money exchanges. Life in the family or the neighbourhood is a good example that makes more visible this all penetrating presence of humanity and generosity in so many aspects of life. People are interdependent and develop a form of reciprocal responsibility one for another.

On the opposite it is evident that the need to sell one's own workforce for money, doing something one dislikes, for someone who does not care, is in complete contradiction with the traditional network of relationships and interdependence I just described. In this way the market attacks the social substance. It is like a war because these two structures and ways of being can hardly cohabitate. Market destroys culture.

Previously I have described how the commons and free access to land are a necessity for the survival of a lively local community. I have also quoted two extracts which described how the destruction of the social capacity to rely on oneself or on one another was in fact a conscious aim which was an important part of the project of the enclosures or of the colonial strategy for domination. In reducing the work relationship to a contract where the worker is selling his workforce for a given price, the market empties one of the main life's functions of its deep significance when it disregards our much larger creativity and our subtle faculties to assure the subsistence of our family in a rich and dense human way. Although we have nowadays almost completely accepted this form of transaction as being inevitable – most probably out of resignation more than out of

conviction – we cannot ignore that the work contract, as it is understood by the market, is a shame for our humanity and a direct menace for our deeper being. This point is very important and we will later come back to this aspect of strong incompatibility between market laws and the humanly deeply ingrained vernacular culture. Culture is here understood as the elaborate form of our deepest immaterial relationships between human beings as well as with our natural surroundings, as opposed to a brutal practice that reduces everything to money only.

It is essential to better understand how such a deep transformation of our life could have happened.

Three quantum leaps in our evolution

Three main quantum leaps have marked the evolution of mankind: the birth of agriculture, the Renaissance, the industrial revolution.

We can describe three main stages of deep transformation (among many) that have marked the evolution of mankind and reoriented its growth along another track. Each of them has brought a quantum leap, i.e. a deep change in quality and level of development, by a fundamental change of our way of looking at the world and at the meaning of life. Of course they would be many more than three stages in the evolution of humanity, but I have chosen to concentrate here only on these three following fundamental anthropological changes that metamorphosed our ways of life because they are very significant for our topic of economic activities:

- 1) The birth of agriculture: At the origin people used to be hunters-gatherers. They were living of what presented itself in their surroundings and they were only getting their subsistence out of

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the products of nature. Through hunting they used to catch the games that they could reach. By picking the available fruits and plants, they used to consume directly what their surroundings was providing naturally according to the regular cycles of seasons. Around the 10th century BC, another way of providing food appeared that transformed deeply the way of life of human communities: agriculture. People had learned to plough the ground and to cultivate their “own products”. Instead of being dependent on providence, they had implemented a way of controlling partially nature and to become sedentary; herds and fields became their home. They learned to store from one season to the next and to exchange surpluses against what was needed. The means for a relative security appeared, and especially for settlement. Humanity learned to be in charge of its own food production. The quantum leap: we are the agents of production.

- 2) The Renaissance: In the 16th century a new way of understanding our world became possible through the development of observation, of science and of technique. The mind became essentially rational and mankind discovered the possibility to control its surroundings. Instead of adapting to a world that was evolving according to the laws of divine energies, mankind invented many means to adapt the milieu to its needs. The quantum leap: we are all little self-relying demiurges (creators).
- 3) The industrial revolution: In the 19th century, the discovery of steam energy and the invention of new powerful machines allowed mankind to produce much more than it was needed. Surpluses had to be sold on the market. Production was organised according to new principles based on the idea of profit that the difference between the costs of production and the income ensuing out of sales made possible. The production and sale of big quantities of goods allowed speculation and accumulation of material wealth in previously unseen ways, at the expenses of a

class of workers who constituted the majority of the population. The quantum leap: competition and the exploitation of my neighbour allow me to become rich if I am quick and clever enough to overrun him.

These three main quantum leaps, although they were linked with great inventions which opened new doors for a fascinating evolution of mankind, brought a change in mentality which happened also to be accompanied by a deep loss in awareness: 1) the birth of agriculture with the loss of an ingrained link of mankind with nature, 2) the Renaissance, with the loss of the sense of the sacred that is the deep nature of human life, 3) the industrial revolution, with the loss of social link and of solidarity as the bases for common life.

These three quantum leaps have transformed the trajectory of our human evolution. It is important to understand that they were extremely rich stages of discovery which opened new fascinating possibilities for our future. Yet they have all three been implemented in a way that discarded at the same time main qualities which were essential parts of our humanity.

These three stages seem to be built on fictive oppositions:

- 1) In fact there was no conflict between the awareness that mankind can help nature to produce food and the awareness that mankind was yet still part of nature and had to abide to its laws.
- 2) There was no conflict between the awareness that mankind could increase its knowledge of the universe and participate in shaping its surroundings and the awareness that mankind's mastery would not replace the sacredness of life and the mystery of its divine source.

- 3) There was no conflict between the awareness that mankind can use new sources of energy and satisfy wider needs and the awareness that mankind was remaining a social body based on cooperation and care of one for another.

Yet a tragedy happened: each one of the first members of these three fictive oppositions has cancelled the second member. The expected growth in maturity did not happen but the new discovery allowed the replacement of an old essential quality of human nature and social cohesion by a new faculty that did not compensate for the loss of what has been abandoned. At each stage a new know-how had appeared at the cost of the loss of an essential aspect of wisdom. Some new technical know-how had replaced some older wise perception of mankind's integration into the cosmos.

The major teaching of this twisted evolution is not that each quantum leap was not worth to happen. The main thing we have to learn out of these missed opportunities is that, in each stage of our evolution, we have not only to discover a new stage of growth but we have also to integrate the heritage of the previous step into the next one. Evolution is not like a ladder where we climb from one level to the next and where we abandon each time our previous position to find a new one. We need on the contrary to learn how to integrate all levels into what we become. It means how awareness has to become broader and broader. It should not leave behind what it has learned in the past but it should combine it with what it just discovered. Replacement is not growth; only integration can bring us further. But integration is evidently more tricky than simple replacement.

In this other form of evolution that integrates all stages into wider awareness, the three quantum leaps I just examined can look differently:

- 1) Agriculture may allow us to improve organic production and to store natural produces but we have yet (integration) to be aware of the generosity of nature and how much we remain nevertheless completely part of it.
- 2) Renaissance helps us to discover that we can better understand the laws of our environment, yet (integration) we remain aware of the sacredness of the universe despite our increased power to master certain aspects of our everyday life.
- 3) Industrial revolution allows us to use new forms of energy, yet (integration) we remain aware that our social body can only rely on cooperation and solidarity if it wants to provide us with harmony, peace and equity.

The great materialistic inversion

Each quantum leap had created a new fiction to which mankind had to adapt in sacrificing a spiritual quality to a material quantity.

The three quantum leaps of the birth of agriculture, of the Renaissance and of the industrial revolution, that I just described, have created each time a new reality: a technical or an intellectual and scientific or a material progress had been made possible by each of these steps but each time at the cost of the loss of a spiritual or philosophical quality, by lack of integration. A new fiction had appeared with its own rules and constraints that were falsely understood as the necessary conditions for keeping control over the material gain that the change had allowed. I intend to call this process an inversion: when the authentic nature of life is denied in the name of privileges, an inversion happens that replaces the true natural law of life by an artificial process that makes this quality of life

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impossible in the name of any material advantage or privilege. In the case of our three quantum leaps we can say:

- 1) Birth of agriculture: the inversion consists in privileging the idea of production under human control over the natural reality of growth and transformation according to natural laws that work with the intervention of man as a helper. This has led us to the ecological collapse we know today.
- 2) Renaissance: the inversion consists in privileging the role of man in the shaping of the environment over the natural reality that life has a sacred origin that remains a mystery and is beyond our control. This has led to the present focus of our civilisation on material issues at the cost of human values.
- 3) Industrial revolution: the inversion consists in privileging the role of competition and exploitation of fellow men over the natural reality of social interdependence and of prevalence of human values over material ones. This has led to the present globalisation of our relationships at the cost of diversity, complementarity and equity.

These three inversions have created the reality we know today and to which we believe we have to adapt. These three inversions are the roots of the many inversions that market economy has created in our lives. To solve the deep contradictions that have ensued out of these radical inversions, we have to come back to a true anthropology which will allow us to rebuild a new understanding of life and a new logic of human exchanges. And economic activities and exchanges will find a new practical role in this new philosophical and spiritual frame, in recombining the rich heritage of our scientific and technologic knowledge with the true roots of our being. We need urgently to recompose fundamentally in a completely new way the pieces of inherited wisdom with the acquired know-how that we have

collected along the learning process of many centuries, yet in rooting them in a coherent anthropology instead of adding them to one another in a disorder regulated only by the type of material comfort and privileges they can confer to us. In this way we will be able to recombine creatively the different components I have described that our past has seen as incompatible oppositions.

But before we do so, we need to look in more detail at these deep inversions that market economy has created in our lives. I will now show how much the intervention of market economy has reshaped our lives, and especially distorted the way we look at what is important for us. The tragedy is that we have learned to adapt to this new artificial manmade reality, as if it were the only possible way to relate to one another, although we feel in the deep of ourselves that this new reality is mad and completely in contradiction with our true human needs.

The inversions by market economy

Having introduced the necessary distinction between the different forms of market, we can now examine how the market (institution of market economy) generates deep inversions in our understanding of the meaning of life and in our behaviour. It is clear that the coming description remains a caricature; my purpose is not to describe how everybody is behaving under the influence of market laws; it is to describe the dominant influence of these laws through many mechanisms that we encounter in our everyday life. The mechanisms are real, yet we remain more or less free not to conform to their influence. Many corporations remain very honest in their behaviours and policies despite any inevitable attraction for real possibilities of increased profit. Other corporations do not hesitate to become even

perverse in order to obtain the best possible gain, even at the expense of essential human values. The choice remains ours. The caricatured mechanisms I will describe are major influential factors of our relationships and it is why it is worth describing them, because we need to see clearly what they are, in order not to be fooled. So, when you read the following description, please remember that it is more about the mechanisms than about what people do. Of course reality is more complex than what I will describe.

These mechanisms are like the laws of physics (gravity, thermodynamics, etc.); they rule our world. By analogy I will also call these mechanisms of market by the name of laws. They are the laws of a manmade order that rules our modern world; the problem is that they are flawed; they are working against the laws of life. At the difference with the laws of physics, they are deep inversions of the original order. This is at least the thesis I want to illustrate now.

The 50 inversions by market

We can describe how the laws of market generate inversions of the laws of life in creating fictions that become realities in our lives.

To make these inversions more understandable I propose the (probably incomplete) following list of 50 inversions we will now examine:

- 1) The law of value and price,
- 2) The law of values without prices,
- 3) The law of value and disvalue,
- 4) The law of price as a measure for everything,
- 5) The law of absence of ethics,
- 6) The law of violence,
- 7) The law of scarcity or artificial penury,
- 8) The law of illusion of added value,
- 9) The law of illusion of loan and debt,
- 10) The law of ill-adapted evaluation tools,
- 11) The law of money as social link,
- 12) The law of appropriation of commons,
- 13) The law of privatisation of benefits and of socialisation of costs,
- 14) The law of destruction of public services and despise of the common good,
- 15) The law of private property and individualism,
- 16) The law of competition,
- 17) The law of inequity,
- 18) The law of mimetic desire,
- 19) The law of everlasting desire,
- 20) The law of one scale and the killing of diversity,
- 21) The law of identity,
- 22) The law of things and no-being,
- 23) The law of victimisation,
- 24) The law of masculinity,
- 25) The law of accumulation-immobilisation-concentration,
- 26) The law of acceleration of accumulation,
- 27) The law of speculation and of speculation on speculation,
- 28) The law of financial deal as devaluation of work,
- 29) The law of reduction of people to workforce / consumers,
- 30) The law of humiliation and inferiority complex,
- 31) The law of uprooting for economic reasons,
- 32) The law of social division (the carrot and the stick),
- 33) The law of accentuation of exclusion and precariousness,
- 34) The law of increase of domination in the name of the struggle against poverty,
- 35) The law of standardisation and the lowest common denominator,
- 36) The law of monopoly,

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- 37) The law of overgrowth,
- 38) The law of creation of poverty,
- 39) The law of destruction of coherence of traditional societies,
- 40) The law of destruction of natural resources and the environment,
- 41) The law of globalisation and imbalance of exchanges,
- 42) The law of the shock doctrine,
- 43) The law of international (neoliberal) institutions,
- 44) The law of democratic incompatibility,
- 45) The law of enslavement of the client to corporation interests,
- 46) The law of complexity at the cost of the control by the local community,
- 47) The law of whitewashing and corruption,
- 48) The law of virtuality,
- 49) The law of the haze and the tortuous (neo-liberalism),
- 50) The law of all inversions (summary).

There are probably still many more other aspects we won't treat here; let's now examine the ones I just mentioned one by one.

1) The law of value and price

Value is an ever changing personal and subjective perception while the price is the product of speculation by market forces.

The law of the difference between price and value (inversion 1) says:

- The market defines the price through mainly speculative considerations (how can one make more profit?) instead of considering the real costs and necessary work's compensation which are involved; the price is believed to represent the true value of goods and services.

- Indeed the price should be adapted to the value of things; yet this is not possible because any value never stops changing according to whom considers it, and it is in most cases not quantifiable, because each value includes so many aspects which cannot be measured, even less according to the only yardstick of currency.

Inversion: We confuse price and value, and we believe that the price is a true expression of value. Yet we feel it is in contradiction with our intuitive and personal values. But the temptation of accepting the price as an expression of value makes it hard not to accept it as a simplification of our choices. Therefore we have lost our personal and subjective ability to evaluate by ourselves values independently of the price which the market proposes as a true representation of the value. Our choices are falsified.

The laws of market never stop modifying the prices of products, despite the fact the products remain the same (same costs for production, same possible use). The market creates penury and plays with it. It can even be advantageous to destroy part of the production in order to sell at a higher price. Paradoxically the destruction of value allows in this case higher prices.

2) The law of values without prices

The market ignores what cannot be sold and the immaterial values which cannot be used for profit (nature, justice, love, peace).

The law of the values without prices (inversion 2) says:

- The market recognises only what can be sold. What cannot be sold (biodiversity, justice, tenderness, natural equilibrium, sun,

generosity) has no value and is ignored. It can be destroyed or exploited to destruction because it has no cost.

- Indeed, these are precisely the highest values, because they have no price; they are priceless. Some attempts have been made to calculate their price (like the price of biodiversity) but, as one can imagine, it has not been very conclusive.

Inversion: We have learned to discard values without prices. We have difficulty to decide paying more for the respect of human values.

Fuel, despite the fact it has needed millions of years to become a natural resource, is sold at very low price, in order to generate a maximum of profit through the consumption of huge quantities and in order also to create dependence of many users on a source of energy which has become so important in our society that almost nothing can be purchased which has absolutely no link with fuel, whether for production, transport, wrapping, etc. All this in breach of the laws of nature.

3) The law of value and disvalue

The market decides what has value, and what has none, what will become a disvalue and will hence be discarded.

The law of the contrast between value and disvalue (inversion 3) says:

- The market gives a price to what it estimates as a value; in consequence what has no value in the eyes of the market (i.e. no price = cannot be sold) becomes a disvalue, i.e. something which

we do not know what to do with, either to get rid of it or to keep it.

- Indeed most of what is considered as disvalue offers a great possibility for further use or for recycling.

Inversion: We have learned to throw away what the market considers as a disvalue, despite the fact it can still have a value for us when we look at it with more critical sense.

Objects we own have a history and therefore a personality in our eyes. They get a sentimental value or keep their usage value because we like them, despite nobody would be ready to buy them.

In India people are ready to recycle any part of any machine or any material or even rags, because they know it has a value on the market (i.e. a price); it can be sold or reused as material. In our rich countries huge quantities of goods are thrown away in perfect state of use because fashion, boredom, greed have decided this has no more value.

The concept of disvalue covers a huge field in our society: it goes from the computer which is no more the last fashion to the wastes of our daily life: peels or rests of food or old flowers give the best compost which is a precious resource for gardening. In the same way we consider our excrement as a waste (a disvalue) which we want to get rid of as quickly as possible. We are even ready to sacrifice precious drinking water to flush our toilets. The water becomes no more drinkable and our own wastes are lost, participating to pollute our rivers and oceans when they could be used as an enrichment for our soil, avoiding in this way the use of chemical fertilisers.

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4) The law of price as a measure for everything

The market reduces all dimensions of life to only one: the price, which becomes the only parameter of our decisions.

The law of the price as a measure for everything (inversion 4) says:

- The market claims that the price is the only truth, the synthesis of all criteria of choice. The price becomes the oppressive force which obsesses the buyer and drives him to adopt behaviours which are inadequate, contrary to his own interests or even perverse.
- Indeed the price represents only the amount which the contractor has estimated to be the most profitable for him. It discards all qualitative aspects (conditions of transformation, social network, ecology, culture, ethics, quality, utility). The real costs will have to be paid one day by our grand-children. The cheapest is always what costs the most!

Inversion: We have learned to take decisions according to what it will cost us (price) and not to the value of all the elements which are involved. Therefore many aspects - usually the most important - are excluded and our decisions are deeply twisted.

The most advantageous competitive price is the main argument for globalization. Production processes are reduced to their minimum in order to provide the cheapest possible goods, even at the cost of quality. This is the recipe for the success of Chinese economy. Because the work is still cheap in China and because the design of products has been reduced to a minimum of quality, the price can be so advantageous that their products are flooding the market. Because the price is so low, we prefer to buy Chinese, despite the fact we know that the quality we acquire is so bad that we will have to

replace i.e. to buy it again soon. On the other hand we are more or less aware that, by buying the products of the competition, we participate in the dismantling of the system of production of our own country. Our own know-how gets lost as well as the know-how of Chinese people how to produce good quality and adapted goods.

Our supermarkets are the places for the whitewashing of goods produced in questionable conditions from the point of view of social well-being, justice, health, ecology, philosophy, etc. We do not know anything anymore about the origin of what we consume, except when labels of quality accompany the good.

It is evident that the costs we ignored and did not include in the price (and did not pay for) are slowly cumulating and expect to be paid later: social suffering, ecological destruction, exhaustion of necessary resources, destruction of soil, water and air, etc.

5) The law of absence of ethics

In the eyes of the market, nothing is sacred. The world is value free. Everything is equal, indifferent. There is no more hierarchy.

The Law of absence of ethics (inversion 5) says:

- The market does not respect any ethical value. It is free to behave as it wants to. The end justifies the means. Our society backs this attitude. This is considered as a progress and called freedom.
- Indeed the majority of people is impregnated with ethical values (do not kill, do not lie, do not steal, do not rape) and aspires to superior values like love, generosity, justice and peace in the purpose of making everybody happy and developing creativity

and a sense of giving or sharing. We are all suffering from the cruelty of market forces.

Inversion: We have learned to accept that publicity lies, that politicians are not accountable for their promises or for the motives of their actions, that profit is a normal aim, even at the expenses of others, at the price of their exploitation or even of their survival, that violent interventions of our governments in other countries are justified when they intend to defend our major interests or our supply in natural resources. The present laws of our world shock deeply our human feelings.

For our society it is “normal” that business and ethics do not meet because cruelty is a “normal” characteristic of our world, especially when market forces are in play.

Publicity is probably the best illustration of this twist: what it shows or promotes is completely in opposition with our values or with the necessary conditions for our spiritual growth: its well-known and well-accepted obsessions with youth, speed, sex, appearances, prestige, power, wealth go against our deepest needs et prevent us from finding our deeper self or from discovering a deeper way to relate to our neighbours and friends.

6) The law of violence

Market is about domination and power. Violence is at the core. The weapons trade is the marriage between violence and market.

The law of violence (inversion 6) says:

- As there is no ethics in the logic of market, everything is allowed in order to get more profit and more power. Life seems to be about power and domination of the other; it means about the practice of violence. Ironically the permanent members of the UN Security Council - who are meant to guarantee peace in the world - are also the five major weapons dealers. They are the dominators of the world and the main controlling powers. Economic interests justify conquering another country in order to secure access to natural resources or strategic power places. Market is an expression of the synthesis between the forces of trade, weapons and politics being just different complementary means for imposing domination.
- Indeed everybody is well aware that the practice of the market is going against main ethical principles. The broad discourse about freedom, human rights and democracy does not fool anybody. Everybody knows that behind political decisions main economic and strategic factors are playing the dominant role and that the human right talk is nothing but the embellishment to make aggression more acceptable in the eyes of the wider public.

Inversion: The practice and logic of market have accustomed us to the immorality of behaviour of vested interests and governments under the pretext of necessity. The immense influence and role of the weapons trade are almost ignored although it concerns a huge part of expenses by governments. And this trade has a terrible impact on the inner balance of so many countries or communities, even on the civil level (see the high level of crime in the US). It escapes completely democratic control although it is probably the kind of trade which influences most the evolution of so many countries. The same is true about drugs, prostitution, slavery, children exploitation.

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It is a paradox that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, that are in principle the most influent countries in charge of helping maintain peace in the world, are in fact also the principal weapon dealers. According to the data by the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), these countries are the five main weapons exporters of the world with the following quantities (total sale price - average annual amount 2012-2015 in million US\$): 1) USA 9'451, 2) Russia 6'885, 3) China 1'777, 4) France 1'571, 5) United Kingdom 1'359. As comparison are then following in the decreasing order: 6) Germany 1'343, 7) Spain 905, 8) Ukraine 783, 9) Italy 732, 10) Netherlands 561, 11) Israel 501, 12) Sweden 349, 13) Canada 292, 14) Switzerland 282, which are not UN Security Members but yet rich and influencing countries, not known to be especially bellicose. In these statistics it happens that Germany follows very tightly the 5 UN Security Council members; according to the 2011-15 average Germany comes even before France and the United Kingdom.

Yet we have tacitly accepted that trade does not need to conform to morality. Violence is a main trend of our society although it is often hidden, like in the absolute dominance of economic values over human ones. The market is a violent power.

7) The law of scarcity or artificial penury

By imposing money as the key for access to goods, even to the most necessary ones, the market creates scarcity and penury.

The law of scarcity and artificial penury (inversion 7) says:

- The market creates scarcity in three ways: 1) in imposing money as the only key that can allow access to the goods which are sold

on the market; 2) in creating artificially a penury of the goods that are available by retaining part of the goods or even destroying part of the production, in order to get a “better” price, it means a price which would be more advantageous for the contractor.

- Indeed necessary goods are in general abundant but their distribution is hindered because other interests than availability or need are at stake: control or accumulation or gain or privileges disturb the natural flow which should help the best way of sharing to take place.
- In creating false needs it exacerbates an excess of consumption poorer people cannot afford.

Inversion: We have lost the ways of mature societies when they ensure the access of all to most basic necessary resources, by controlling the way these resources are shared, or consumed at a reasonable rhythm given the rhythm of their reconstitution, or by storing what needs to be kept in prevision for harder times. We have lost also our ability to satisfy our needs through parallel circuits such as bartering or exchange of services.

Penury is often the consequence of speculation, of retention in the purpose of selling at a higher price, or of accumulation by a minority.

Many people are prevented from entering the circuit of market because they do not have cash at the start although they have skills and the desire to be involved and the readiness to commit themselves to any work. In this case a system of local social currency can provide the necessary help to allow these people to integrate into the social and economic network, as it will be explained later. This currency is indeed not real money but a means for people without any cash (any initial amount) to be immediately involved in exchanges. The use of this fake currency does not provide a real value but

constitutes practically only a way of counting how much value or how many hours have been worked and exchanged.

8) The law of illusion of added value

The market claims that the value of a product increases with its price: yet a real increase in value depends on real improvement.

The law of illusion of added value (inversion 8) says:

- The market describes any increase of price as added value although each increase of price does not correspond with an improvement of the quality or of the use of the good.
- Indeed, as the value is not linked with the price, the increase in value of the product (real added value) has to correspond with an improvement in the quality or in the use of the good. The improvement is only real if the change is considered as necessary.

Inversion: I have described how the resulting price of a product is no more linked with the costs of production. When a good is transformed (“produced”), the transformation is generally no more motivated by the purpose of providing the client with an adapted satisfaction of his needs but by the will of the contractor to get the maximum profit for himself. Any further transformation will then seem justified if it can provide this supplement of benefit. The real added value can be null in terms of use while the price has increased. The market will call this difference of price an added value.

Speculation plays with location (i.e. transport) and time (i.e. storage), with repackaging or fashion design added elements to increase the price of goods for sale. Transport and storage do not add value to these products, unless these goods are made available where or when

they would not be (place, season). Transport is mainly used today to allow lower costs of production (more benefit) by dislocating production. Goods today, and even food which should be by excellence produced locally, are transported on thousands of kilometres before they reach us. A pair of trousers can be transported many times through the whole continent in the successive stages of its confection. The confection adds value to the raw material but the transport does not. In the same way, when storage and conservation allow availability of seasonal products to be consumed later, they provide a useful service. When they only aim at increasing the sale price, they remain sterile.

The market considers as added value any form of profit, whether it is generated by the sale of items or services at an excessive price or whether it is provided by speculation, i.e. a “clever” way of investing available capital, on the share market or as credit.

9) The law of illusion of loan and debt

Banks create new money, or speculate for credits to provide high benefits on interests, in general at a high cost for the borrower.

The law of illusion of loan and debt (inversion 9) says:

- In order to stimulate consumption and to speculate on the availability of cash, banks and other financial institutions invent all possible forms of credit generating for them an important income from interests. They create new money, such as loans (mortgages) or credit cards, which is not covered by any guarantee of conversion (gold or similar). This is very risky money.

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- Indeed, the debt and credit system favours the rich and disadvantages the poor, because the load of interests causes a handicap which is most often disproportionate in regard to the service provided by the lender. The interest of the loan is like a price to pay for the borrower in order to be able to dream of future benefits which are less than certain. Illusion!

Inversion: What seems to be an encouragement for the weaker to help him improve his situation is eventually used by the provider as a means for accumulation and exploitation. Only when they are controlled by collective interest and provided at an interest rate which corresponds to life index, smaller loans can become means for more equality.

Easy possibilities for credit encourage people and even countries to become heavily indebted, especially when salaries do not allow people to cover their daily expenses, or when the generally low incomes of the majority of workers do not provide enough tax returns for governments when they do not want / dare to tax the richer minority.

If generated in speculative conditions, the loan becomes often a vicious circle for the borrower who spends most of his income in paying interests without even being able to repay part of the initial capital. The load of interests and cumulated interests (compound interest) constitutes an important part of the increase of prices or costs which prevents poorer people to access subsistence.

Many forms of aid to so-called developing countries are provided by rich nations in the frame of consultancy agreements that are used to recommend some heavy forms of investment for often unsuited infrastructure. The contract of financial support is provided under the

condition that the contract for implementing the infrastructure goes to national companies of the country that provides the funds. In this way a juicy business is provided for rich nations at the expenses of poor nations which become heavily indebted for no use. It is clear that such debts should be cancelled as they are evidently corrupt.

Only forms of small credit (such as the ones of the Grameen Bank - Bangladesh I have described earlier) managed in the purpose of supporting the projects of poor contractors at the lowest possible cost, can offer a real encouragement for a well-grounded and necessary growth at grassroots level.

10) The law of ill-adapted evaluation tools

The evaluation tools of economy measure quantities (prices), instead of evaluating the quality of processes and nature of flows.

The law of ill-adapted evaluation tools (inversion 10) says:

- The market uses only the financial flows (money, prices) to measure the reality of what happens, although the price is not a truthful indicator.
- Indeed, it is the quality of all flows involved (resources, energy, work, knowledge, creativity) which should become the true measure and qualitative indicator, because it would allow to indicate the qualities that are involved and how they relate to the natural and social cycles.

Inversion: The misuse of indicators like prices and financial flows to measure economic reality generates indexes like the GDP or other quantitative coefficients, which measure the financial means involved in any operation as if they were the representation of real wealth.

Qualitative flows (resources, energy, knowledge, work, etc), including their quantitative aspects, should be the true indicators because they would show what is really involved and transformed and how far it integrates into the natural or social cycles or how far it helps the local community to meet its needs and to grow and become more mature.

It has already been showed how the GDP is falsified by the fact that identical activities in different contexts (for instance the repair of shoes in India or in Switzerland) involve different prices and quantities of money, although they are identical activities, and therefore cannot be compared; or how it does not consider whether the financial flows it measures have produced drug, weapons or health care and education skills; it has also been showed how the price is not a true indicator of the value involved.

Corporations practise a measure of flows only in financial terms (income and expenses). They ignore generally how much energy they need to produce a given item and how this energy is produced, but they only know how much they have paid for the total amount of energy and by how much these costs have increased or diminished. They do not consider either for instance from where and by whom the knowledge which has been applied is delivered or how this transfer of knowledge improves the possibilities in training the future generations or in offering more chances to disadvantaged categories of youth.

11) The law of money as social link

The market imposes money as a form of social link onto the social network, in replacement of existing patterns of relationships.

The law of money as social link (inversion 11) says:

- The market has its own laws: it converts into money everything it can offer; it absorbs traditionally sacred values such as work and nature as simple merchant goods; it uses a single tool of evaluation (the price) for all choices. In doing so it creates new patterns of exchanges which substitute themselves progressively to the existing patterns of rich human relationships based on much more complex and subtle forms of evaluation. In our modern society money has replaced kinship.
- Indeed the new pattern of social link that the market proposes as new model is an extreme and poor caricature of what life and relationships should be.

Inversion: A lively community is composed by a dense network of connections on so many different levels that it can never be reduced to the use of one single tool of evaluation (price), because in these human relationships all aspects of life are involved and play a role: basic needs, technical know-how, friendship, conflict, individual and common interests, power struggle, jealousy, social recognition, imagination, courage, spiritual values, solidarity, etc.

This point has been our starting point in this chapter about the twists created by money and market. It reappears here because it is an important mechanism of market.

The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has been quoted before who said that in our modern society money replaces kinship because money regulates the relationships between people, instead of these relationships being guided by more complex human criteria and personal decisions or attitudes. Kinship is the complex network of

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relationships, including obligations and prohibitions, between members of the same family or the same clan, as well as in the context of contacts and exchanges with other persons, families, clans, tribes or nations. In fact kinship is culture, i.e. the art of relating, that is guided by the network of values which leads persons and groups in their behaviour and choices. When money replaces kinship, it simply erases this faculty to develop subtle human contacts with others, and substitutes itself to culture. One could say: when money replaces kinship, money becomes culture!

Our market society has created a new system of measures which is a flat land: in this flat land, the social network loses slowly its sense of hierarchy of values and of preferences for privileging certain qualities; a common culture slowly dissipates which could foster a better ability to choose priorities. It means, for each of us as for the community as a whole, a considerable impoverishment of our ways to relate and to interpret life and make our own choices gets lost. Indeed life is culture, i.e. the art to choose what is creative and generates harmony.

12) The law of appropriation of the commons

The market conquers everything it can (if not protected), such as the common wealth that should remain accessible to everyone.

The law of appropriation of the commons (inversion 12) says:

- The market tries to appropriate for itself everything that is available and could be a source of profit. It grabs and privatises what is not explicitly protected by law or by force: natural resources, knowledge, heritage, social substance, human creativity, etc. As it has no capacity for self-limitation, it invades

the field of the commons, i.e. the vast domain of common property which is the main resource of any community, whether or global: i.e. its experience, its know-how, its natural surroundings and resources, air, water, sun, public space, silence, education, social consciousness, democracy, sense of justice and equity, solidarity, etc. The market (i.e. under the form of powerful corporations) tries even often to patent in its own interest some aspects of this common property.

- Indeed the public status of these commons is extremely important for the harmonious development of the community and for its basic survival. This common wealth should be under strict protection in order to allow all and everyone to access it without restriction yet without degrading it.

Inversion: The market appropriates itself the wealth of the commons and prevents normal people from accessing freely the rich resources of what should be shared in equity, and should not become private property.

This point about the commons has already been examined earlier and reappears here as an important mechanism of market. Wealth does not depend on the accumulation by a few, but in the wide accessibility of common goods for everyone; the wellbeing of the members of the community depends essentially on the quality of these common goods. The commons constitute a very fragile form of wealth because it is precisely accessible to everyone, and yet should not be deteriorated by the use that is made of it.

13) The law of privatisation versus socialisation

The market tends to privatise what can generate privileges and benefits, and to socialise what can generate costs and obligations.

The law of privatisation of benefits and of socialisation of costs (inversion 13) says:

- The market affirms that activities that generate profits should be led by private interests because they are considered to be more qualified to manage benefits for the contractors and to generate growth for the whole of the society. This is called the “trickle down principle” according to which a privileged class of society must be in charge and get rich before the simple workers can get some marginal benefits. On the other hand the role of the state is understood to have to correct the imbalances that these private activities cannot avoid creating (pollution, exhaustion of resources, cost of infrastructure) and to repair their negative side-effects (unemployment, poverty).
- Indeed, in this way, only the small part of the most beneficial factors of the transformation process is considered by the corporations. The model of the market refuses to repair the damages “production” causes and to consider the necessity to care for the common wealth when it is not forced to, because the obligation to consider these evident facts would limit its freedom of action and it would cost money to repair these negative impacts.

Inversion: Instead of taking upon themselves a full responsibility, corporations take what they need and ignore the consequences of their action. And this is thought to be the role of the state to compensate for all negative side effects. Public money has in this way to pay for what has generated private profit and for the repair of consequent destructions. Private profit is subsequently subsidised by the state.

This is the famous distinction made by Marx. If private interests had to support all the costs of their activity, from education to environmental destruction, from unemployment to equity, from quality of work conditions to quality of life, profit could not remain the principal motivation for their activity.

It is unavoidable and even normal that any economic activity benefits from the common wealth of social and technical infrastructure (education, health, communications, roads) or from knowledge and creativity (know-how, awareness, generosity) to which it does not contribute directly. On the other hand, any economic activity has also an impact on the natural environment, on the social context, and generates imbalances or destructions. It would seem normal that the corporations that are involved in these processes should compensate the community for the advantages and imbalances that they have been causing and that they would care for the commons in order to increase their content instead of depleting them.

It is evident that any accumulation of wealth in corporate and private hands is only possible because real costs are ignored and supported by the whole community. This is naturally truer for big businesses (such as fuel companies, food trade corporations) than for small corporations which are more locally visible and accountable. If all aspects of economic activities would be considered as necessary constraints and included in the calculation of costs and benefits, more equity would prevail and equity would provide more stability. The most equal societies are generally the most thriving ones. It shows how much the “trickle down” principle is an illusion, or a treachery.

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14) The law of destruction of public services

The private sector takes over what it can profitably conquer; there is no more care for the common good or concept of public services.

The law of destruction of public services and despise of the common good (inversion 14) says:

- The market takes over the sector of public services (public transports, health, water, electricity, education, communications) in order to transform these services into economic lucrative activities. The will for profit in these highly sensitive fields destroys the notion of public service and perverts their capacity to answer the needs of all people, although their basic function is to care for all, independently of who they are (race, age, gender, belief, wealth).
- Indeed the notion of public utility and of the common good must not only reconquer the vital fields of social services and all activities impacting on our quality of life but also impose itself as the main criteria for the choices concerning our present and future, including the field of private activities.

The inversion: The practice of the common good has been abandoned in the hands of private interests. A growing sector of population is neglected because they do not constitute a lucrative target for these private interests. It is why only a neutral institution (state or community controlled), fully devoted to the common good, is able to manage fruitfully these sensitive sectors.

The tendency becomes today ever stronger to privatise public services: transport, communications, education, health, water and electricity supply. Even in public services new criteria of economic efficiency are replacing the general concept of common good and of

support for all members of the local community. When private interests are given the opportunity to control activities meant to serve public interest and common good, a whole portion of these activities is left behind. The water company will not deserve anymore the poor quarters, the bus or train company will no more stop in little villages or bother for remote mountain areas because it would slow down the general movement of traffic or be too costly for so few users.

In more traditional or more local societies the awareness of the common good remains more lively and the necessity of caring for all remains more evident, for the wellbeing of the whole community. The notion of common good can only be kept alive by a lively social network which will be clearly motivated to find the means to protect this invaluable quality.

15) The law of private property and individualism

The market system is based on two sacred principles: absolute protection of private property and celebration of individualism.

The law of exacerbation of private property and individualism (inversion 15) says:

- The market has based its logic on the absolute protection of private property and on the promotion of individualism as two corner stones. Having, i.e. accumulating material goods, becomes the highest purpose in life. Anything that could threaten our belongings or the way we consider their importance has to be resisted in order to defend social stability as if the system of private ownership were the base for our survival. The difference between what is mine and what is yours is clearly established; and the limit between us both is also clear. The world is split into

microscopic individual or small group entities and loses its coherence, its wholeness. Individualism (with its inevitable sense of loneliness) becomes the rule of behaviour, as a struggle for competition in a hostile world.

- Indeed private property is only reduced to a few necessary items; most goods are common: the Earth, air, water, climatic systems, social knowledge, justice. And we depend on one another for most needs and activities. We are all interdependent, because we live in a complex and specialised society, in which each part is necessary for the whole to function. And love is only possible because we are linked.

The inversion: The market creates the illusion that happiness relays on material wealth and that life is an individual struggle for survival, against the collective interest, although our main personal human concern consists in being recognised, appreciated and loved. This is precisely the role of the local community to control and limit the impact of individual activities to what is favourable or at least not damageable for the common good.

This topic of private property has already been examined earlier, mainly in terms of ownership opposed to use. It is important to come back to this theme, here in its relation with the common good.

It is not the whole of private property which is questioned here, but more the excess of it. It is indeed important to distinguish different types of private property. On the first level my tooth brush and my clothes represent evidently a form of property that is very private, because they are my very personal items. On a further level I use every day many items which are considered as my property because I am the principal user of them. It is more the use I have of them than my title of property that makes them mine. Similarly the field or the

garden I cultivate become progressively mine because I am the actor, the one who works in them to assist them in their natural potential to produce food or flowers. I do not own their ability to grow vegetables or fruits, and I do not own the sunshine or the rain that falls on them. The Earth does not belong to anybody but fields and gardens are taken care of by very well defined people whom they nourish. We have tendency to confuse property and use. In fact, as we saw previously, the less private the form of property is, the more accessible the goods become, and the access to their use also. It is why property can be a true hindrance to free use.

What is here mainly at stake is the excessive protection by our society of the inappropriate uses it makes of property, and not whether we have a right to own our tooth brush. Already at Roman times, there was a clear juridical concept of use and abuse of property. The rule was: “*uti sed non abuti*” (use it but don’t abuse it). It meant it is all right to own one’s house but it is not acceptable to set fire to it just for the pleasure of seeing it burning (as Nero did with Rom). In other words property is not an unlimited right. The central question is: how far is private property justified? How far is the owner free to use it at his/her own pleasure. It is where the role of the community becomes an essential jury because it is its duty to draw a clear limit and to enforce it.

When property becomes real wealth that distinguishes the owner from other members of the community by the amount of power it confers to him/her, it is the role of the community to restrict this power and to avoid it becoming a threat for exploitation or destruction. It is where our modern society has a great difficulty to reach a more mature stage of development because it considers that property should be protected in any case. Not only the Roman principle “*uti sed non abuti*” has lost its meaning, but it is well

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accepted that wealth gives a right to use it to increase wealth, and in this purpose to oppress the possible slaves who can contribute to it. No control is welcome. Exploitation, violence and destruction are parts of the system. They are not even condemned, or punished.

In fact private property is in our modern society the real hindrance to true democracy. True democracy is not an electoral system, but it is a deeper maturity and awareness about the common good and the necessary restrictions of individual freedom to ensure the thriving of the community, the equity of treatment for all, the free access to equivalent possibilities of expression and the possibility to be recognised and appreciated. Democracy is this form of awareness of the appropriate aim and means; it is also the empowerment of the community to implement this appropriate means to use wealth.

Through history the access of poorer people to their right of contributing to main social decisions (which kind of society does one wish oneself?) has always been impaired by the more wealthy classes. Poor people are in general considered as a danger for social stability. The right to vote and be elected has been for many centuries reserved to wealthy people, as this right was linked with fortune and property. It is true that a deeper social awareness of most members of the local community will impact on justice and equity issues, in the way it will try to restrain privileges and make access to social wealth (care, education, infrastructure) more equal.

This is in fact the role of the community to develop its awareness and spiritual maturity in order to harness economic development and to submit it to common wellbeing and to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. The challenge for the local community is to agree on the most basic orientations, if possible by consensus. In this way

democracy is indeed actually a menace for the private interests which do not care for the social good.

16) The law of competition

The world becomes a battle field where individual interests compete. Competition replaces the natural law of cooperation.

The law of competition (inversion 16) says:

- The market considers the rule of general competition between all actors involved on the market scene as the best way to establish the right balance (i.e. the right price) between all forces in play. This is what is called the self-regulating faculty of market, according to classic free market economics. The market promises every actor to become a winner, as if there could be only winners. Relationships are based on competition. Resources and goods are said to be scarce hence there is a race to get them.
- Indeed, like in nature, cooperation is the law that regulates relationships in diversity and complementarity. Competition is an illusion because it denies the deep interdependence of all human beings. And human interdependence means that harsh competition is in fact truly incompatible with healthy economic activities.

The inversion: In creating this fiction of competition which is opposed to the normal model of cooperation one finds in nature, our modern society seems to create an artificial law that runs against nature. Competition seems nevertheless to answer a deep rooted anguish, for all of us, to become more real when we can be stronger than “the other”, better than “the other”, as if we would need a victim to be fully valued. Domination and exploitation, although they make

our lives more difficult, in a permanent struggle against “the other”, seem to make us more alive, more aware of being distinct from others.

Our empty lives seem to get content, based of course on wrong premises, yet a kind of content that seems to satisfy our anguish. The spirit of competition is probably not the true nature of our humanity but more its way to function under stress, when good conditions cannot be given because they have been twisted by false rules, illusions, violence, misunderstandings. In this corrupt way our practice of humanity, our anthropology, seems to be built on the opposition to “the other”, who is the bad one, the one to defend ourselves against. Complementarity - it means differences between races, cultures, religions, genders, trades – when we practise it in conditions of stress, seems to require from us to become victimisers, although we would never accept to recognise openly we have succumbed to this terrible tendency!

The market does not say about the competition system it has established that there are indeed more losers than winners. Every time there is a winner, there is inevitably also a loser. How could anybody win something if it were not lost by someone else? And, most often even, great wealth is made out of the loss of many losers in “favour” of only one winner, according to the law of numbers.

In nature diversity and complementarity do not generate competition but cooperation because these positive qualities are the wealth for survival: each species depends on others (animals on animals, animals on plants, plants on plants, plants on minerals) even if almost each one becomes in turn “food” or “predator”. This is the true form of complementarity in cooperation: predators take only what they need to survive. In this way they are only normal members of the

community. No species - except our human species - bases its survival on exploitation or destruction or eradication. There are no declared enemies. After having caught a game, the lion lies down and looks at the other games with indifference.

Our need to become the dominator, the victimiser of “the other”, arises probably from our personal inner insecurity which is at the same time strongly reinforced by the laws of competition of our society. This sense of insecurity, of insecurity in our own identity, is certainly a main twist reinforced by market economy in our social life, while it is also rooted in our own natural fears.

A traditional society that does not have the wider possibility to speculate on prices, because it mainly consumes what it produces, has little room for speculation and profit and does not know competition in the same way as we do. Money does not become then such a powerful factor of social life and the community remains in control of the quality of relationships between people, that remain essentially personal and human... which does not exclude conflicts and anger!

Fear of competition and of “the other” leads us to violent behaviours as long as we are not aware of our deep human similarities with these others, beyond our differences. The more we learn, personally and in our community, to control our fears and the more we become willing to promote cooperation, the more we create a climate where competition seems irrelevant and where complementarity and interdependence are enhanced and provide wealth. This form of cooperation, which is more similar to the natural pattern, can only participate in making ourselves more confident and trusting. This is the only way to true cooperation and social harmony.

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17) The law of inequity

Social status is defined by how much more one owns than the other. The higher the social ladder, the more prestige at the top.

The law of inequity (inversion 17) says:

- The market creates competition between individuals or between smaller groups like families or clusters of common economic interest. The major aim of life consists in climbing the social ladder and in accumulating more material wealth and power. This confirmation of one's value by what one owns plays an important role in reinforcing self-esteem. When self-esteem is stronger, one becomes bolder and often more successful.
- Indeed this form of competition, if it can confirm the value of the one who is successful, will also destroy the self-esteem of the one who does not succeed according to the official measure of success by the yardsticks of the market.

Inversion: The market proposes to organise people along a social ladder based on competition instead of helping people to find the right way to cooperate. This is the ladder principle which allows to measure falsely our respective social empowerment. In fact cooperation is much more fruitful than competition. Cooperation does not need domination; it values the capabilities of all, especially in their own diversity. Through cooperation more people are valued, according to more diversified criteria, and in many varied ways, while competition is exclusive and destroys the other, for the simple reason that he or she is "the other".

It is evident that social cooperation brings more satisfaction than competition does. All contribute to the same success, and there is no

need for domination, no need for a few winners and many losers. All become winners. There is no measurement of success because diversity is valued.

In their book¹¹ *The Spirit Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrate how more equalitarian societies (like Japan or the Scandinavian countries) have less social problem than more unequal societies (like the US or the UK). They show how equality offers a better health, a better education, a better social mobility, less violence, more trust, etc, and this not only for the poorer categories but for all the social classes. A number of graphs and a deep research in statistics allow the authors to confirm what they describe. This is a clear sign how much equality is a bonus for all, from the poorest to the richest.

18) The law of mimetic desire

Advertisements generate uniformity and the want for what others have. Competition is based on sterile imitation, i.e. conformism.

The law of mimetic desire (inversion 18) says:

- The market wants to control our desires and what we want to acquire. It reduces our wishes of growth to the only measure of accumulation and success, established according to the competitive law of material ownership (ladder principle). It attempts to create in each one the same want for material goods and especially for the goods the other has. The trend to accumulate is based on imitation. In this way competition has a paradoxical aspect: one wants to distinguish oneself in doing

¹¹ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett: *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2009.

what others do. And still more extreme: competition makes things more difficult by the way it creates a sharper competition in promoting a quest which focuses mainly on what others want, it means in reducing the range of possibilities to a smaller selection of what is most desired. Competition means not only a race between people who are driven by desires but also a radical reduction of the range of what can be desired or of what is encouraged to be desired, by mere imitation of the others.

- Indeed imitation is a basic trend of our personal growth; it is how we develop and integrate into our community and how we assimilate culture. It is the way we learn to do what others do: going, speaking, writing, behaving, relating, etc. Yet healthy imitation generates individuation, it means the way we learn to become ourselves, i.e. different from the others. Truthful imitation is a tool which is meant to bring diversity.

Inversion: The mimetic forces of the market are forcing people to focus on the same goods. They create in this way a strong source of conflicts because, in increasing the want for the same goods, they create tension and violence, instead of diversification and personality.

It is essential to distinguish imitation, comparison and competition.

- 1) Imitation is the natural instinct of doing how others do, in order to learn and acquire the skills they have. This is the base of culture; it creates a huge potential for creativity. Yet when imitation focuses on acquisition (as it is the case on the market) it creates a strong competition of many for a few goods. The rarer the goods, the more people will compete. This creates evidently a strong source of conflict and violence. René Girard¹² has described this

mechanism very well. He makes it even the fundamental base of our main customs and prohibitions.

- 2) Comparison is a natural way to situate ourselves in relation to the others. I am smaller, older, have darker hair, etc. This is a basic means to become aware of whom we are. Comparison has to help us to be aware of our uniqueness, and to be more ourselves than ever. One could say that our perception of identity is comparative and relative. In a positive way comparison has to help us become more aware of the originality or conformity of our choices, of our skills, of our weaknesses too, more than of their measure or intensity which cannot be compared. Only when this process of evaluation is accompanied by a judgemental comparative measure of our respective qualities or by a severe judgement of ourselves or the others, it becomes a negative and destructive attitude, i.e. when it uses the same scale for two different people. Comparison should allow more discernment into our lives and more courage to be unique and different.
- 3) On the opposite, competition is a measure of all according to the same yardstick. Competition can certainly stimulate excellence but it very often destroys self-confidence in the one who does not excel. In competition, only the first is revered, sometimes the second and the third too, like in the Olympic Games. All the followers are ignored despite their remarkable results.

Imitation and comparison should stimulate our diversity and make it more visible and appreciated. Indeed we are all different, with other skills, other tastes, other needs, other aspirations. Why should we try to turn this rich diversity into a competitive race that can only raise violence and destruction?

¹² René Girard: *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford University Press, 1987.

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19) The law of everlasting desire

Acquisitive desire loses interest for what it gets and moves to the next unreachable object. Satisfaction is impossible, greed remains.

The law of the everlasting desire (inversion 19) says:

- The market encourages the development of all desires, especially the acquisitive desires for the object that seems out of reach because the subject does not have it and wants to imitate the other who has it (mimetic desire). It means that, as soon the desired object is acquired, it loses its significance, because it is no more what the other has and the subject does not have. The acquisition of the desired object has broken the attraction because it has re-established equality with the other.
- Indeed desire is by nature impossible to satisfy. It is one of the main teachings of Buddhism: the satisfaction of any desire can only quieten the desire for a short while and the desire is soon reactivated ever stronger, by the simple fact that the satisfaction has been pleasurable and calls for repetition, in our case the acquisition of what the other has.

Inversion: The market plays on a weakness of human nature that gets caught in the illusion that the satisfaction of desires can bring joy and peace. Yet our own everyday experience shows that it is not true and that we need to become aware of the inextinguishable character of desires. The context plays here a very important role. It can either help us to become aware of the illusion of the satisfaction of desires, when it makes us aware of our true path for growth, or it can try to trick us and encourage our thirst for material security and consumption. The market has chosen to strengthen this latter weakness of ours because it suits its interests, despite the fact it harms personal growth, social life and care for nature.

What is most important is not how much wealth one has but how much less or more than the other. The measure is not absolute, depending on what one needs or desires, but is relative, in comparison with the status of the other. He has five watches, I have “only” four; I need to get one more! although I need in fact only one to know the time. This shows how much social classes are based on mimesis, i.e. the imitation of the other, of what he has or desires, yet with the addition of surpassing him in this trend. Social classes based on wealth and power are principally generated by a combination of mimesis and competition; this seems deeply contradictory!

The topic of desire is one of the inexhaustible themes of philosophy and spirituality. All desires are of course not equal and have not the same impact on our life; some are focused on material acquisition and comfort; some are oriented towards a deep search for meaning. My statement concerns here acquisitive desires that are centred on objects that the market can provide. For spiritual growth, as the saying tells it, there is no acquisition of ready fruits but only of seeds.

The important inversion that needs to be made clear is the following: acquisitive desire is focused on objects that the other has and the subject does not have. The mimetic desire is based on this attraction of competition where the other seems to be superior because it has something the subject does not have. This is the main part of the attraction for this object. As soon the object is acquired, it loses its power for attraction, because it is no more an aspect of difference that is valued as a sign of superiority for the person to be imitated. Hence the object, when acquired, can be enjoyed for a while. But soon another desire takes form which aims at another object because the imitation of the other has moved the focus of attention of the subject

to another object of attraction. Even the real existence of the other is superfluous; the other can just be another “me” I imagine.

This characteristic of our everlasting desire and yet of our ever moving focus of attention in the relation we establish to objects is certainly an important factor in the endless consumption we practise, where values become so quickly disvalues. The market is the main force to convert values into disvalues: what is no more regarded as worth of attention or attraction.

20) The law of one scale – killing of diversity

There is only one scale: material ownership, prestige and power. Everybody will be evaluated according to this unique scale.

The law of one scale or killing of diversity (inversion 20) says:

- The market reduces the extreme variety of all values of life and of our social experience to one only scale of evaluation, based on the quantity of stuff we own and on the measure of our economic power. Our position on this scale (ladder principle) will define our position socially. If we are high on this ladder we will acquire all the honours (and illusions) of prestige and power. If we are badly positioned, we will be despised. This unique scale of evaluation pretends to be valid for all goods and people, for all skills, all cultures, all races, all ages, all genders, etc. It is meant to be universal, despite the fact that the world is as diversified as this absurd scale is unique.
- Indeed diversity is the true wealth of our world. Where cultural diversity (many customs, many languages) reigns, biodiversity reigns too and has been preserved. Our own choices make this diversity still more explicit because we are free to practise our

own values, which can be a way to refute the one scale of social ladder. We can choose poverty (as St Francis and Ste Clare did), or any other priority which goes against the general trend; freedom is the way to follow our true vocation and to follow truth.

Inversion: Globalisation tends to flatten diversity, and to unify our ways of living. Every year many languages disappear, many ethnic groups vanish or are integrated into global market society in the name of uniformity and standardisation.

Diversity is a challenging aspect of reality because it calls us to be ourselves while others are different. We are always a bit insecure in our identity. It is why any form of confirmation of our identity we can find in material and visible things appears to us as a support and encouragement. Yet diversity is the core of complementarity. We can survive only because diversity makes us all special and unique; and for this reason we can rely on each other to be complementary. Even in a traditional society each one is in a way specialised in what they can do and they depend on others for what they cannot do. It is so evident: diversity of gender makes birth possible, diversity of age and maturity makes education possible, diversity of skills makes trades possible, diversity of vocations makes each one of us unique and necessary in their community.

21) The law of identity

The ladder principle is meant to provide our identity, in a hierarchy established on market values. Identity is understood as competition.

The law of identity (inversion 21) says:

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- The ladder principle measures the quality of our identity in relation with our position. Are we better or worse than our neighbour? This question has been simplified to the extreme: there is only one quantitative measure.
- Indeed our identity is a complex network of relationships, of differences, of options. Yet we are all unique and cannot be measured. Certainly some people are more gifted than others, but it is only one difference between many and it cannot become the measure for hierarchy, unless it is only for this precise topic.

Inversion: The market with its one scale tends to let us believe that we are all clones, sitting on this scale. This has nothing to do with identity. Identity is at the same time relative and absolute. It is relative because we need the others to know who we are. We need comparison to become aware of our unique nature. Yet our deep nature is absolute, because it is given and does not need anything special (especially not acquired objects) to be deepened and expressed. Our true nature is. It is our root, our deeper being.

In everyday life we need indeed to develop a social persona to be able to interact with others, but this persona is a kind of shell which protects our vulnerability. It is not our true identity which remains always more or less hidden, even to ourselves, as our life is a means to discover who we are, and who the others are. All means of expression are certainly necessary and welcome, but they do not make our identity. They only make it perceptible.

Identity is another fundamental topic of philosophy and spirituality that cannot be exhausted in a few sentences. In relation to our description of market, it is important to emphasise that the market tries to make us slaves of acquisition to become someone. The deep contradiction is that our nature pre-exists our being in the world. Our

deeper identity is the root of our being and, like being, it does not depend on being this or that (man, mother, plumber, tall, blond, clever, compassionate) although all these qualities are important and can be part of our personality in the world. It is where comparison plays an important role that has been side-tracked by economy: it allows us to become aware of differences, yet these differences are no yardstick to measure how we can be situated in terms of hierarchy on the social ladder. If comparison leads us, beyond awareness of who we are, into judgement and classification, we lose our precious uniqueness. This is exactly why the influence of market is so pernicious and destructive: it creates mimesis, competition, opposition, violence, instead of offering the joy of exchanges and diversity that are the marvels of life.

22) The law of things and no-being

On the one scale of the market only things can be measured; and people become things (no-beings) as workforce, consumers.

The law of things or of no-being (inversion 22) says:

- As the market accepts only the one scale it has created, there is only room for things, because they can be measured in quantity and price. There is no room for being. It is why people become no-beings and are reduced to be things: workforce one can buy for a given price (salary), consumers with a given buying power that it is possible to lead to the consumption of things that need to be sold. Therefore advertisement needs to create an image of what is showed as happiness, and credit is organised in order to improve the buying power of people who seem to be too poor to satisfy the expectations of the sellers.

- Indeed as people we are no-things; we are beings. Our nature is so much in being that we could say we are no-things, we are nothing but being. We are not even beings (with s for plural), as when we mean that we are individual people who are, but we are being (without s as for the progressive form), that is people in the act of being. Being is the process in which is involved someone who is. Being is just the fact of being. It is not a thing, it is.

Inversion: The market and our intrinsic doubt in our own way of being human (who we are) have made us very vulnerable: we have lost our capacity for just being. We have learned to be this or that, i.e. I am a man, I am a father, I am Japanese or Australian, I am a doctor or a joiner, I am always something. No, indeed, I am no-thing. I am.

The mystery of being is certainly the true mystery of life: how can I be without being something? To be no-thing, i.e. nothing is our chance. We can be in the present, at each instant we are different from what we were a fraction of time earlier. Yet we are also in continuity. Being is a process in a constant transformation and yet in duration and continuity, nevertheless without permanence.

Who am I? This is the deepest question of our life.

23) The law of victimisation

The one scale requires that there are people on the top who live on the expenses of people at the bottom; the system needs victims.

The law of victimisation (inversion 23) says:

- The ladder principle maintains a strict hierarchy between the few who have more and the many who have less. It is the essence of

the system to create differences in hierarchy between people. It becomes vital for the system to have many poor and few rich people, because the attraction of ascension is only proportional to the height of the ladder. The system of the market needs exploitation to function. There is a basic violence in this logic which needs to find victims to dominate.

- Indeed our modern society based on competition and accumulation does not care for all members of the community to get what they need. The community is not understood as an interdependent body whose each member has to have their needs and desires satisfied. Solidarity is in contradiction with the hierarchy according to wealth and power.

Inversion: The stability of our society relies on a strict hierarchy and needs to find its own victims. The coherence of the group is maintained by the marginalisation of the victims or of the enemy. The lower social class, the poor, becomes the possible menace. They become the others, the ones who do not belong. Marginalisation ensues out of the rejection of the weakest, because they are the weak ones and the rejected victims, instead of being considered as the ones to be rescued and reintegrated.

I have already mentioned this tendency to victimisation as a trend that is a non-dissociable part of the competition principle. It is very surprising and hard to accept that our stratified society is based on differences between social classes as a condition for identity and stability for the ones who succeed in this game. It means that it is necessary to have poor classes on one hand and successful (rich and powerful) people on the other hand. The latter have to be fewer than the former. Social identity is linked with this position and the tacitly antagonistic relation with the exploited. We need to create victims.

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The coherence of our society is based on identification in relation to these victims or enemies.

The distinction of social classes is based on this principle. Antagonism between ethnic groups or religious communities is an expression of this form of identity rooted in conflict. Even wars perpetuate because people are born enemies and remain enemies and behave as enemies. They represent danger to one another and are behaving aggressively towards one another and become in this way a real threat to one another; therefore they remain enemies. The cause of the conflict can have vanished or become of secondary importance. The conflict is principally maintained in the representations one never stops constructing of the other. The war between Israel and Palestina is an illustration of this tendency. It does not mean that the conflict is invented; it means that the representation of the other as enemy dominates the game, independently of, or reinforced by, the real cause.

This state of permanent conflict shows how much our society is built on exploitation and victimisation, on a permanent violence which is the cement of our stability. Our personal or collective identity is certainly very fragile and needs to be encouraged to develop in conditions of trust and cooperation. Yet it is much easier to generate fear and aggressiveness. Our whole political world is based on opposition, rivalry and competition, on fear and enmity, on violence and conflict, more than on trust and cooperation. This is because we have chosen to ground our identity on the position we occupy on the social ladder, more than on our capacity for being solidary and caring for all members of the community, understood as one body whose well-being depends on harmony and mutual assistance. Market economy is an essential motor of this aggressive trend: it creates

differences of status and conflict instead of bringing all people together.

24) The law of masculinity

The market exacerbates masculine activities (production of things) at the expense of feminine attitudes (subsistence and care).

The law of masculinity (inversion 24) says:

- The logic of market is based on “production” and how much profit one can get out of sale and speculation. It encourages activities called production which have to bring a financial income. These are mainly masculine activities in the transformation of matter into things which can be sold. These activities can be characterised as masculine (yang) in the way they are oriented towards the exterior. They do not concern the subsistence of the family, the more feminine (yin) activities. They are necessary for the subsistence of the family, but they achieve this only through the import of an income made out of external exchanges.
- Indeed the most basic needs are more relevant of subsistence which can be characterised as feminine (yin). Home food production, education of the children, care for health, love between members of the family are mainly feminine (yin) qualities which are not valued by market economy.

Inversion: Our whole society, and especially the mechanisms of market, privilege masculine values over feminine ones. It is important to understand that masculine does not mean exclusively man and feminine does not mean exclusively woman. We are all inhabited by masculine (yang) and feminine (yin) tendencies or

values, independently of our gender. It is why probably the designation by yin or yang is more appropriate.

Subsistence is more a yin oriented attitude because it is based on care and acceptance and love. Market and trade are more yang oriented. This has nothing to do with valuing more women than men, it is about attitudes in life, whether they are more caring or more aggressive. As we will see later, traditional (so called vernacular) societies have certainly a more feminine oriented subsistence mode, yet hunting and war are parts of it, that can be identified as masculine activities.

With the predominance of masculine values over feminine ones, women become the victims of our society. This is probably a misunderstanding of the feminist movement that it made men responsible for the oppression of women – it is true that very often they are – but it completely missed the point that our society, supported and reinforced by the logic of market economy, is privileging yang activities at the expense of yin attitudes. It means that indifferently women, as much as men, are engaged in exacerbating masculine aspects of our culture and devaluing most attitudes of care and peace-making that remain reserved for the exchanges inside the family, at least when families are not too dysfunctional. This illustrates once again the victimisation process which is playing in a hidden way in the background.

In our modern society it is interesting to notice how much the yin role of society for tasks like education, health, social services are trusted to the responsibility of the state, while the yang activities of the market like production and trade are taken by the private sector. It is what is called, as mentioned before, the privatisation of benefice (yang) and socialisation of deficits (yin).

25) The law of accumulation-immobilisation-concentration

When we accumulate wealth, we retain what should circulate and deprive others or ourselves from sharing / enjoying this wealth.

The law of accumulation, immobilisation and concentration (inversion 25) says:

- The accumulation of goods generates a concentration of wealth in the hands of the more fortunate (in the material sense). This concentration is regarded as a source of power, respect and influence, but it is indeed only “stuff” without life. This accumulation does not provide the owner with much more enjoyment. How much stuff do we have accumulated on our shelves and in our sheds or garrets, that remains stored and never used?
- Indeed when we accumulate wealth, we prevent others from accessing these same goods. It is like a dam on a river that prevents the natural flow of the water. People downstream cannot use what has been retained higher up. They are deprived of goods which could be very useful for many if their use could be shared and made possible for many instead of one single owner, and this without diminishing the value of these goods or having to increase their quantity. Such a way to allow a more fluent circulation would provide a better equity and more people would be satisfied.

The inversion: The market has taught us that we are happier when we accumulate goods. Yet our experience is that the sharing of goods creates more links between people and gives access to more diversified goods than mere retention. It is a basic law of classic

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economics: the more goods circulate, the more people can be enriched by the use of them. It means that we should learn to share what we value the most instead of keeping it for ourselves: the book which has inspired us, the music which we like, the tools which have helped us, etc., we should give them away to the ones we love, instead of keeping them on shelves or in drawers!

Accumulation is probably more often triggered by a feeling of emptiness and lack of liveliness or by a will to impress the others than by true needs. It is frequently a form of compensation for a lack of immaterial goods, such as self-esteem, love, social respect, meaning of life. It is a bit like comfort-eating; we do not need it, but it does us good because it fills our emptiness.

The law of the broad circulation of goods as a source of wealth for all, instead of a privilege for a minority, is very interesting because it lies at the core of classic economics and even of modern market economics. The principle of calculation of the GPD is based on this principle: a society where goods are circulating - in the case of the GPD, circulation is measured in terms of money exchange – is richer than a society where it is not the case. As we have shown previously this calculation of GPD is erroneous because it does not include exchanges outside market nor consider the qualitative outcome of each exchange. Nevertheless the principle of circulation remains true: when goods circulate, they become accessible to more people who can then enjoy the use of them. Let's be clear: this statement is not about increasing consumption, it is about free circulation of, and easier access to, goods.

What should be learned out of this principle is the fact that sharing and free access to the use of diversified goods is a great source of

wealth, with less material involved. It is why more equal societies are richer than more stratified ones.

26) The law of acceleration of accumulation

Accumulation provides owners of capital with increasing possibilities for profit; this means general impoverishment for all.

The law of acceleration of accumulation (inversion 26) says:

- It is believed that free market economy has to make the accumulation of wealth easier for those who have already accumulated some wealth because they are the leaders and they need to have the means to invest more, to stimulate production and exchanges, in order to create more wealth which will finally profit all.
- Indeed more accumulation in the hands of the most favoured (which means retention as we saw) fosters an increase in the gap between rich and poor, and less access to goods and services for the general population.

Inversion: The more a privileged minority or speculators accumulate wealth, the more poorer people have to live with less (smaller incomes) and are deprived from many goods which are retained in the hands of a few. This leads to a general impoverishment of all as it deprives the network of exchanges of the basic financial liquidities which are necessary to stimulate exchanges. As Keynes has demonstrated, it is better, in case of slow-down of the economy, to provide a stronger buying power to all in order to stimulate consumption and the circulation of goods. On the opposite, accumulation by a few means in fact starvation of cash for the majority. It is equivalent to starving the system of its necessary

means for the regular flow of exchanges, i.e. killing the goose that lays the golden eggs!

This statement is the corollary of the precedent: accumulation not only deprives the poor; it deprives the whole system (the whole social body) of the necessary blood.

More sharing allows a better spread of wealth which brings more peace and harmony. On the opposite inequality fosters inequality. And inequity generates violence and many other social problems as it has been described before. When the community is aware of the necessity of managing equity, it will organise ways of redistributing wealth, through small credit, subsidies, or other forms of benefits that can help people who get into poverty to regain a better position.

On the opposite concentration generates regional disparities, like between cities and countryside or mountain areas. Regional disparities on turn generate concentration because people from poorer regions are attracted by wealth and leave their home, where life becomes more of a struggle because of these disparities, in order to find (illusion!) better conditions in other places (cities) that visible accumulation lets shine as an Eldorado. This is one of the main factors that trigger urbanisation.

27) The law of speculation and speculation on speculation

Work does not make us rich; speculation on the value of 'things' allows profit; shares allow speculating on potential profits.

The law of speculation and speculation on speculation (inversion 27) says:

- 1) Speculation: this is the basic purpose of the market to play with the prices of the goods offered for sale in order to get the best possible profit for the seller. Profit is not to be confused with income; it is a supplement of gain which is not justified by any added value or work or costs involved in the transformation of the product, but is made possible by speculation on the fact that the buyer is ready, for any reason, to pay more than the price that would ensue out of the real costs of transformation.
- 2) Speculation on speculation: on the other hand, our modern market economy has invented the stock exchange, which allows third parties to buy shares in the capital of bigger corporations with the hope that the value of these shares will increase if the corporation is making more profit than expected. The shareholder speculates on the capacity of speculation of the corporation.
- Indeed these forms of gain, which have nothing to do with the process of transformation, are made possible by speculation only and for people who are not directly involved in the transformation (such as owners of the corporation, intermediaries, investors, shareholders). This gain through speculation can only be made possible because it is deducted from the income of the workers or because it is detached from the value of the goods. In both cases it is a part of the added value which is redirected to people who did not work for the transformation of the product. One gets rich without doing anything, while the workers do not get recompensed to the just value of their work.

Inversion: The basic fundament of economic activities, in any kind of transformation – whether material or non-material - is based on the workforce and creativity of the people who take part actively in the transformation (from the first idea to the end product) and in making the product available to the users (oneself or others). If any exterior agent is involved in this process for the only reason that this can

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provide an income without requiring any work or effort, it is evident that the process will be deeply affected and that the true actors will inevitably be disempowered and exploited.

Firstly about speculation: as said before, profit is not the income of work. As it is not the produce of work, it is a gain which one gets without doing anything productive. For instance, when the seller plays on the value of the goods to be sold by storing them (retention) in order to make the price rise, he is acting but his action is not productive. It is on the contrary harmful for the user or buyer. This non-activity or “activity of non-doing” is yet rewarded by a profit, which is usually much higher than a normal work income and has to be extracted from somewhere. It is generally financed either by a reduction of the worker’s income or by the increase of the sale price. In the former case it diminishes the compensation of the worker for his subsistence. In the latter case it is part of the useful value of the good that is detached from it and diverted to the hands of actors who have nothing to do with it. In both cases this artificial wealth is retained and taken away from the community, it means stolen.

Secondly about speculation on speculation: the shareholder system puts a huge pressure on corporations and on all economic activities because these activities have to liberate an impossible benefit which can be made only possible by ways of destruction or exploitation: under-wages, insecurity of work conditions, degraded social conditions, destruction of natural resources, appropriation of common goods, de-location, etc. People, activities and their meaning have lost any significance, only profit counts.

28) The law of financial deal as devaluation of work

As economic activities are reduced to a mere provider of profit, work loses its significance as creative and link producing process.

The law of financial deal as a devaluation of work (inversion 28) says:

- The market tends to reduce any economic activity to its mere financial dimension; only the amount of the possible financial gain of the deal, in relation with the risk taken, is measured in the decision to act. This form of evaluation, reduced to mere financial aspects, discards all qualitative dimensions of these economic activities and especially ignores the purpose and meaning of work that has principally to do with the degree of human quality of these activities. For the market the usefulness and quality of the product are no more a requirement. Conditions of production are submitted to financial imperatives.
- Indeed the core of human activity is by essence a creative process which aspires at the satisfaction of the worker and of the client or user, and even of the surrounding community. Work is a process of personal expression which involves all dimensions of the human being and of his relationships with nature and his community.

Inversion: The core of meaning of economic activities that is substantial - i.e. the work and its creativity as well as its natural, social and cultural context – gets destroyed by the parasites (speculators of all kinds) who try to exploit the economic field for their own interest. It is vital that work can remain the activity where people express themselves and choose which values are central for them.

If the financial deal is no more the principal issue, economic activities can be evaluated according to their human dimension: the purpose of their result, the degree of their necessity, their impact on the natural or social context, their compatibility with moral, intellectual or spiritual values. Any economic activity has evidently to serve a practical purpose and be financially realistic but nevertheless beauty, harmony, imagination, service, expression, generosity and many other similar immaterial aspects remain essential components that cannot be discarded for the reason that they would have no price on the market.

The question we have to answer when we are involved in an activity is: do I want to grab any possibility to exploit any situation to my own advantage, whatever it costs to my surroundings, or do I want to express my best gifts and offer them to my community in exchange of the necessary conditions for my subsistence? This is the key issue.

29) The law of reduction of people to workforce / consumers

Work is considered just as one of the components of production to be paid at a minimum rate to make the financial deal optimum.

The law of reduction of men and women to simple workforce or consumers (inversion 29) says:

- The market considers people only as simple workforce or necessary consumers, and not as human beings. As workers they have to sell their workforce (mainly their time more than their skills) to the contractor against a global amount of money (wages) which, they hope, will enable their general subsistence, from week to week or month to month. On the other hand, as consumers, people have, from the point of view of the contractor,

to buy as much as they can, it means, they have to be convinced to exchange their money with the seller, against as many goods as possible, without too much consideration how well the concerned goods will answer their needs and help them to grow into deeper and happier beings.

- Indeed work as well as consumption are means of expression and choices and their economic aspect is only one among many other dimensions of human life like creativity, generosity, self-esteem, awareness, social recognition, research, wonder, gracefulness, need for deepening the meaning of life, joy, love.

Inversion: The work contract on the market is based on a deep misunderstanding; the contractor just wants to obtain the best bargain and the best financial result for himself, while the worker wants a good life and a maximum freedom in his / her own evolution, whatever the concept of evolution can mean for him / her.

Work is considered by the contractor as a simple good available on the market and to be purchased at the most favourable cost, in the same way as other components of the transformation process, or any good sold on the market. In the work contract the contractor proposes the minimal conditions he believes will be sufficient to convince the workers that they should offer their time. The priority is for him to optimise the financial deal and all costs must therefore be reduced to their minimum. Work is just one of them, in this way not different from costs for material, energy, rent, infrastructure, capital, advertisement, transport, etc.

From the point of view of the worker, work includes all aspects of his / her human life, whether domestic or public, material or spiritual, aimed at having or doing or being, egocentric or altruist, remunerated

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or freely given, etc. It cannot be reduced so drastically to a mere transfer of money.

Between the respective points of view of worker and contractor, it could not be a deeper conflict of expectations. Yet it is evident that, without the dominant presence of the attraction for speculation and profit the market fosters, any free agreement concerning work and reward could bring full satisfaction for both parties. This is what happens in general with smaller fair businesses, especially at a more local level, when actors are aware of what work can offer as possibilities of human development. By contrast the behaviour of big corporations seems almost a caricature taken out of anti-capitalist propaganda. Yet, in both cases, the context of a market economy remains what it is and continues to determine the principle laws in action which impact on work conditions. All corporations have to submit if they want to compete. Yet there is an important margin of freedom for creating better work conditions, as the practice can easily illustrate it, because this form of improvement reveals also economically fruitful.

30) The law of humiliation and inferiority complex

By denying work its value as human expression, the market lets us believe that money is the only motivation for work. Humiliation!

The law of humiliation (motivation by money) and of inferiority complex (inversion 30) says:

- In denying work a wider human meaning and in reducing it to its simple financial dimension, the market affirms that the only motivation for work is money. It reduces the worker to a machine ready to sell his workforce for any price. There is no more room

for creativity. The personal motivation for a stimulating activity does not play anymore the role it should.

- Indeed most people would be happy to enjoy a work which could allow them to be valued, create opportunities for learning, sharing, exchanging, and provide an activity that ensures subsistence and whose aim would not be reduced to getting an income.

Inversion: When the worker is reduced to his / her economic value, s/he feels humiliated and discarded. The worker is forced in this case to adapt to what is shown as inevitable, although this evolution is only a pretty recent innovation in the field of human activity that has been introduced since the market has grown into a master of our lives, especially since the industrial revolution, where machines made the play on value easier in proportion to the quantities produced and this evolution transformed completely the understanding of work into a mere economic factor influencing production costs.

When we take care of our children or cultivate our garden or repair the roof of our house, we feel we contribute to the well-being of our loved ones. We feel valued and recognised, although the work itself can be unpleasant, painful and difficult, effortful, dangerous or repetitive. The nature of the activity itself is not the only factor that defines the meaning of the work; it is much more its significance in the social context. Of course such a work has to provide the means for subsistence. It is not a pure dream in an ideal world, but it is part of daily reality that nevertheless encompasses all aspects of life and can be oriented in a more personal way by the one who practises it. Such basic conditions constitute a human right for emancipation and expression.

In reducing work to its financial dimension and in asserting that money is the only motivation for the worker, work conditions are degraded to such a point that money becomes the only reason why people are finally ready to work. The lie which has generated bad work conditions and has forced us to submit, despite our true motivations and aspirations, becomes true through the destruction of our life conditions by the market. The humiliation of the worker is strengthened by this degradation and his / her complex of inferiority, or tendency to become depressed, as much reinforced, by lack of meaning in everyday life. This kind of disintegration process participates as well to reinforce the domination of the market on people, because subsistence is only available through money and money only through work, whatever the conditions are.

31) The law of uprooting for economic reasons

As the market plays with transport and dislocation of activities, people have to migrate for their survival, uprooting themselves.

The law of uprooting for economic reasons (inversion 31) says:

- Since human workforce has become a simple economic factor, the market can play with the life of workers in order to get their force at the cheapest price. In this purpose it creates conditions of competition and introduces external factors into competition: transport of goods, dislocation of activities to foreign countries where workforce is cheaper or social protection weaker or ecological regulations less constraining; or it encourages centralisation of production in poles of development (urban centres, large population areas, regions with low taxes or weak regulation). This deep transformation of social conditions generates important migrations.

- Indeed migration for economic reasons is rarely an improvement or enrichment because it is mainly based on external constraints which usually participate more to degrade the original life setting than to offer new possibilities of thriving elsewhere.

Inversion: The belonging of people to a particular region, culture, social community is an essential dimension of life. When this form of belonging is made impossible because the general economic system has participated in degrading the usual conditions for subsistence at home, there is something deeply wrong in the process of this degradation.

Workers have to bear the consequences of this form of speculation and work for lesser wages or migrate to find another job elsewhere: to the next city, to another country where they'll be seasonal workers, usually without being able to be accompanied by their family, having most often to adapt to completely new, strange or even aggressive living conditions.

Migrations have always played an important role in history but they have always happened in drastic situations (famine, wars, persecution). Now the market has made out of human displacement and uprooting a basic tool for manipulating the different costs involved in transformation processes and exchanges. It displaces activities in order to find more advantageous (i.e. cheaper and less constraining) conditions of production which mean also degradation of work conditions for the workers. Or it imports fresh and cheaper working force from elsewhere. Or it transports the goods to other regions because of more favourable prices.

To make this statement more convincing, it is enough to mention the example of the pair of trousers that travels thousands of kilometres

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through the continent in order for the material to be woven, stained, and then to be cut, sawn together, or have pockets, buttons or belt added, in different places, and finally to be sold. All these successive efforts for transport happen for the simple reason that the contractor has been offered cheaper work conditions by subcontractors elsewhere for one of the stages of the transformation. The product is in this way transported many times across the continent, although transport does not produce anything and is even ecologically destructive and costs money, yet less than can be saved on the transformation process.

It is unbelievable how much people have to suffer in order to allow the trousers to be sawn at lesser cost. Price, although it does not correspond to anything consistent or meaningful, is the dominant factor of our lives under the power of market.

32) The law of social division (the carrot and the stick)

Contractors have learned to play with the employees in offering minor personal advantages in order to break workers solidarity.

The law of social division or of the carrot and the stick (inversion 32) says:

- Some 50 years ago, in western “developed” countries, it was broadly accepted that work conditions had to be negotiated between employers and employees through trade unions and according to state regulations. It was recognised that these conditions should be protected by law in order to ensure stability for the system and security for the people. Nowadays the market and the ideology of neoliberalism as well as social apathy have become so powerful that trade unions have lost a lot of power.

Bigger contractors have even learned how much more advantageous it is for them to forbid trade unions inside the compound of their corporation and prevent any union affiliation for their employees. They prefer to negotiate work conditions individually. When they are without scruples, they propose to their employees taken one by one some minor advantages and promises of future improvement in order to create competition and suspicion between work colleagues and to break any possible resistance or solidarity.

- Indeed only social solidarity, even between contractors and workers, can provide the quality of work conditions which is necessary for harmonious relationships, quality processes of transformation and social wealth to take shape.

Inversion: The obsession for profit and the strict financial aspect of work contracts hides the essential reality of what happens between people, when power destroys people. Social coherence - which does not mean absolute similarity of interests but mainly capacity to negotiate in order for everybody to find their own interest well protected - is the only possible way to ensure a good quality of life for all. Good work conditions can only stimulate creativity and generosity in the work contract.

The principle “divide to reign” is as old as our world. Yet it is time we learn that consensus, social cohesion and spirit of cooperation can offer much more than struggle, conflict, tension and violence. The strategy of the carrot and the stick can certainly bring some temporary short term advantages, but contractors and shareholders, investors and managers are human beings like other people. They certainly are capable to see that life is broader than money. I hope that ignorance and stupidity are more frequent in our everyday relationships than cruelty and evil spirit. Social maturity, which is a

benefice for all, remains the supreme wealth of any society, whether we are aware of it or not.

33) The law of accentuation of exclusion and precariousness
The reinforcement of conditions of fragility and dependency makes people more submissive and therefore more “adaptable”.

The law of accentuation of dependency, exclusion and precariousness (inversion 33) says:

- The market generates intentionally our dependency as workers and consumers. The more this dependency increases, the more the market increases its power to control our lives in order to force us into what it needs for its own profit. The fragility of the status of employee increases and makes precariousness a means for keeping more control on people.
- Indeed this extreme power of the economic system upon our lives creates only material, human and social misery. It generates mainly anger and hate and a spirit of revenge. This will for control allows effectively a short term profit for a few, but it accumulates long term a gigantic debt, because it is so destructive for the whole social network, for the trust people have in each other, for the aspiration to work for the common good.

Inversion: The want for material gain, even at the cost of human destruction, does not bring more than “stuff”. The social cost is gigantic. And, worse than anything, any social problem becomes an advantage to keep people in line, instead of being a problem which should be solved as soon as possible, in the interests of the ones who suffer as well as in the interest of all.

The law of social division I just described encourages corporations to treat each employee in competition against the others. Each smaller privilege or promise becomes a way to isolate the worker and to create tension in his or her relationships with colleagues. Unemployment reinforces the menace to be sacked, the reduction of wages makes the situation more fragile, competition with colleagues puts pressure on the efficiency of the worker even sometimes at the cost of their relationship with clients if these clients are too difficult or require too much. In this same spirit bigger employers (like the supermarket Wal Mart in the US) forbid their employees to belong to a trade union. To be accepted as an employee, one has to renounce one’s elementary rights! Employers prefer fragile workers because they can manipulate them better.

34) The law of increase of domination in the name of poverty
The struggle against poverty becomes the slogan which allows more globalisation and free trade, which profit essentially the rich.

The law of increase of domination in the name of struggle against poverty (inversion 34) says:

- The major economic interests and the richest governments of our planet try to convince workers and consumers (i.e. their citizens) that the opening of national markets to free trade and to globalisation will increase the global wealth of all and allow poorer people to have access to a better standard of life. There is a general belief that economic growth will profit the poorest. But the experience proves exactly the contrary. In this way poverty, or more exactly what one calls the struggle against poverty, becomes the reason for more domination, more exploitation and for politics that will create a growing gap between rich and poor.

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- Indeed it is well known that any developing economy needs consolidation before it can confront competition and that the most powerful is generally the winner in competition. Rich western countries have grown under conditions of protectionism. It is one of the reasons why they reached the level of development and economic power they have. At this stage free trade and globalisation become advantages because these richer nations are the powerful ones and can use their power to get advantageous conditions from poorer countries or corporations.

Inversion: The discourse pretends that free trade will allow poor countries and people to get their just share of general wealth, but it is in fact exactly the contrary that happens. More globalisation and less protectionism make the poor more vulnerable and unable to protect himself.

Neo-liberalism tends to cancel all trade protections. It wants a totally free competition: agriculture from the dry land has to compete with the most fertile soils, traditional craftsmanship or vernacular techniques have to compete with high technology, social welfare and strict ecological regulations make it hard to compete with countries where there is no social protection and no ecological awareness.

Diversity of geography, climate, culture, technology, regulations, know-how, as well as social and political awareness create all over the world an incredible diversity of systems with their own potentials and weaknesses. It is evidently only an illusion to pretend that this diversity can be measured with the same scale and placed in the same conditions of competition. Indeed diversity needs protection and even special conditions to be able to thrive. Our economic system does exactly the contrary when it dismantles existing protections.

It is important to understand that this statement does not mean to cut off all trade connections and to return home and have nothing to do with the neighbours. No, it is only about the awareness that diversity needs protection and needs to provide diversified and adapted conditions for each one to thrive. When the essence of each culture, of each society is well protected, it is then possible to think of exchanges and of a larger opening to the other, which means also opening to this authentic diversity which has been protected and still needs to be cared for. Exchange becomes in this way much richer, because it is based on true complementarity and interdependence, like between the cells and organs of one same body, and not on money.

35) The law of standardisation at the lowest common denominator
Domination is an impoverishing force that is flattening the world in destroying what creates contrasts, accents, antinomies.

The law of standardisation at the lowest common denominator (inversion 35) says:

- The powerful influence of market economy on our society and our values is based on the attraction we have for material signs of who we are, or more exactly we hope to be appearing to be. This invading power is hence touching the most profound layers of our identity and of our choices of life. It is why it participates to homogenise our cultures and ways of living. In Peru, in China and in Nigeria, one consumes the same products.
- Indeed, by making the same goods available for all – which is said to be a factor of development and growth – it kills more authentic traditional and local aspects of identity and therefore precious qualities than it brings an improvement in people lives.

Inversion: Globalisation is more the vector for the propagation of a given way of life, of an economic system and of a whole system of values expressed by the market, at the cost of diversity, of local identity and social cohesion, than it is the generator of new links and exchanges based on the true wealth that diverse cultures offer in their true essence. An intensification of exchanges could be the source of a general wellbeing and enrichment in complementarity of the ones by the others, but, because it is based essentially on profit and money values, globalisation has favoured mainly material exchanges understood as the generalisation of western materialistic preferences at the cost of what diverse ethnic groups, cultures, communities are. It is a flattening process, in the name of conquest, of everything that gives sense: the lowest common denominator is the dominance itself.

It has been a striking aspect of colonisation: the dominant power had usually only knowledge of its own language, while dominated populations could use their own and also learned the one of the occupant. The same can be said of ways of life, of objects of interest or consumption and of general systems of values. Dominated ethnic groups learn usually to use both ways of communication, their own and the one of the dominant power. Yet the privileges offered by the dominant way are so evident in terms of success that one needs to be extremely clear in one's mind and spirit to be able to resist this attraction and remain faithful to one's true cultural identity. The capacity to create a hybrid culture is not common and the process is far from being evident. If the mixt of elements in provenance from diverse cultures can be a true enrichment for the dominated culture, it appears very often that it brings long term more elements of acculturation and de-structuration. In this case the attraction for the privileges of the dominating power becomes more effective although the attractiveness is not due to the superiority of these dominant patterns but to the fact they are playing in a context of power struggle

which makes them appear more attractive for the only reason that they are expression of more power. When indigenous people adopt Coca Cola or McDonald they do not get any increased value, they just succumb to domination under the illusion of fashion and false power. In fact they lose more than they gain. That is what is called the principle of the lowest common denominator. Everything is flattened down. The landscape had been simplified to a unique plain: no more accents, no more contrasts, no more high peaks, no more dominant values nor hierarchies of values. Only flatland.

36) The law of monopoly

The growth of corporations/institutions imposes an exclusive way of satisfying needs (i.e. consumption) at the expense of self-care.

The law of monopoly, inspired by Ivan Illich¹³, (inversion 36) says:

- When a corporation or an institution takes shape and grows, it tends to develop an exclusive way of delivering goods or services that becomes a form of monopoly because on one hand it is based mainly on consumption of highly technical services (that means disempowerment of consumers) and on the other hand it tends to replace progressively our traditional and more autonomous forms of self-care or social and local empowerment that cannot be practiced in a space dominated by the new corporate or institutional practice.
- Indeed as members of a living social community and as astute human beings we are capable of answering the major part of our needs by self-care or care for one another. Most traditional means

¹³ Ivan Illich: *Medical Nemesis*, 1975, or *Tools for Conviviality*, 1973 or *Deschooling Society*, 1970. What is exposed in the next pages (concerning the 3 next options) is a free interpretation of what Illich describes.

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(remedies, tools, knowledge) are able to answer most of our daily issues.

Inversion: The service that is meant to become a provider of a quality we could not afford by ourselves, whether by lack of financial or technical means or by lack of specialised knowledge, interferes powerfully in our life and makes it more difficult for us to do what we have always done in so diversified fields: for instance take care of the fever of our sick child, buy milk from local farmers, ask the local healer or the neighbour for help, take our elderly mother home, transport our pig to the market, etc.

It is not that these traditional ways of satisfying our needs become completely impossible; it is that they are made more and more difficult by different institutional models and corporate practices: for instance by the form of institutional health care that imposes a professional way of healing that is exclusively conferred to medical doctors at the exclusion of any healer or lay person; or by a way of selling milk, as practised by supermarkets, that destroys the local market and prevents farmers from selling milk privately in the name of a regulation that takes control of measurable hygiene standards; or by a system of public transports based on comfortable and quick trains and buses that do not accept pigs as passengers as the local trucks used to, etc.

Our market mentality has converted the essential function of public services into a business that makes us simple consumers, disabled of their traditional knowledge.

It is important to see that the development of institutional public services, such as health care, education or public transports, generates a network of technical services that are meant to be consumed

passively by the users; services should indeed provide a support that would enhance the capacity of people to develop their own autonomy and responsibility, with the positive effect of increasing their degree of knowledge and their range of initiative and empowerment.

The people who use these services become like assisted and disempowered because these services are made so complex and out of touch. They deliver a form of care that does not include the collaboration of the user; they are based on the principle that the user is completely ignorant or irresponsible and must be taken charge of; they provide a unique form of care that does not offer alternatives. For instance the medicine practised in our hospitals is white man medicine based on corporate knowledge and powerful pharmacology. Transports are based on sophisticated infrastructures offering few rapid means of transport instead of complementarity of diverse means and speeds. Education is based on a main curriculum, almost exclusively at school.

The monopoly consists in the consolidation of the power of one corporation or institution that controls the dominant practice and excludes all other ways of doing, especially ways that are gentle, empower the persons and make them responsible for their choices. We are condemned to become compliant slaves and passive consumers. Old traditional ways are forgotten, whether they concern health, mobility, learning. For instance the traditional remedies and forms of grandmother's care are despised although they have always provided most of the basic care needed. Institutional health care cannot be adapted to the personalities or profiles of the users because it is believed that appendicitis can only be cured through surgery, cancer through radiations and chemotherapy, etc. Traditional medicine and healer practices become therefore obsolete and even are

forbidden or at least severely repressed in their rights to be given as treatments.

This aspect of monopoly does not mean that institutions are unable to provide real and profitable services or care. It means that the way these services and care are delivered creates mainly exclusion: exclusion of the user reduced to be consumer, exclusion of other traditional means that become obsolete. This new form of exclusiveness is based on the belief that our present practice is more effective. Yet the experience we have accumulated of this new form of care does not prove it to be more efficient: ever increasing health costs; less low cost basic medicine but more and more sophisticated treatments for people who can afford them; many side effects and complications due to highly technical treatments and heavy medication; extension of heavy therapies that often become negation of the life they intend to preserve; increasing focus on the physical aspects of illnesses (tests, surgery, chemical or mechanical treatment) at the expense of more subtle sensitive, psychological or spiritual aspects of the patient's life. All seems to indicate that there is a problem, yet the more an institution is confronted to the problem of its inefficiency, the more credits are voted to extend this way of doing, in the name of its inefficiency! Without questioning the reasons why it works so poorly.

37) The law of overgrowth

Corporations/institutions tend to expand beyond their capacity to master the goods/services they offer. Overgrowth creates chaos.

The law of overgrowth, inspired also by Ivan Illich, (inversion 37) says:

- Following the logic of market, corporations or institutions are meant to grow endlessly. The growth process seems to be an uncontrollable force that brings any institution beyond the limits of its efficiency and generates its own collapse when it becomes unable to manage the services (health, education, transports) it is meant to deliver.
- Indeed services should have to meet people where they are. They should adapt to the nature and range of the needs of their beneficiaries and they should remain self-limited in their ambition. What matters most is the quality that has to enhance the lives of the majority of people of all categories, and not the reverse, when people become the consumers that adapt and feed an institutional monster.

Inversion: Instead of offering a service, i.e. a quality that has to serve humanity, institutions become ever bigger and powerful. They are managed according to principles inherited from market economy and technology, instead of being shaped according to the rules of harmony of the surrounding social network.

The overgrowth process of institutions and corporations seems to work like the Peter Principle that says that employees in an institution will be promoted until they reach their level of incompetency. It is important to see in this obsession for growth that it is not fuelled so much by a will for control and power – although it is also often the case - but rather by the logic of free market that has to create an image of the product that is for sale. This image is the value of health, of education, of transport that is created as an ideal product sold on the market, and this value or image develops independently from the understanding of what we believe wellbeing, knowledge, mobility should be.

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Institutions are originally understood to deliver services that will offer solutions for their “consumers”. In doing so these institutions create also, more or less unconsciously, an illusory value of the service they offer as an ideal of best possible life. The consumers are as much attracted by this value of best practice, reinforced by an attraction for the role of passive assisted consumers they are expected to play, as by the function of the service itself. Consequently this value of success or satisfaction - that is rarely proved by a critical examination but nevertheless becomes ever stronger - generates an increase in the number of consumers and an extension of the field of the services on offer. These services extend until they become impossible to manage because of the overload and complexity they have generated. Hospitals become gigantic and treatments cost more and more until health insurances cannot afford anymore to cover their costs. Professional schools and universities, instead of delivering more and more knowledge for all students, adapt the training they deliver to the narrow expectations of the market and become the strict conditional passage for social promotion and professional success. Transports develop their speed, reach and comfort to the point that people spend many hours a day in cars or trains, or that cities become unreachable at rush hour, and that whole regions are drained of their human and social potential. The overgrowth of these services generates chaos because the fictive value they rely on generates a development that goes much beyond what they are meant to deliver.

The birth of the institution is rooted in this value that is attached to it, as an image of its success: the advertisement for a washing powder will show a woman dancing in a white fresh dress evoking the purity and lightness of a healthy cloth. In the same way health is shown as the youthful painless joy of life in a perfect physical body. But life does not run along these lines. It includes a constant evolution and transformation that kills many cells and generates many conditions of

pain. Life cannot be painless (which does not mean it should be painful!). It is evident that the ideal image and value of painless health that is understood as the repair of our faulty bodies does not include the many preponderant aspects of this permanent inner transformation we are meant to follow at our own speed and in our own way. Health is not a state. It is a slowly ever evolving process of mutation that follows our inner evolution. Age is not the negation of youth but another stage of life when we become more mature. Luckily we do not have to repeat eternally what we have done before!

The main flaw of the way our health system is designed and evolves is that technique has replaced meaning. Decisions are taken to repair the body as a machine, as detached from the person. The logic of repair is the one of mechanics; it means it has lost its connection with the deep meaning of life. From a technical approach, how can we go back to a practice that is anchored in the meaning of life? That is the question that should lead our choices. Such a complex and essential dynamic of life cannot be integrated into a process that understands the body as a chemical and mechanical machine that can be repaired by medication and surgery. This body is more than the addition of its parts because it is part of a wider whole that includes many subtle aspects. Death is not the negation of life. Pain is not the absence of joy. Life is (self)-creation. It is not a product we consume; it is a flow that inhabits us. Health services can be an important support in this process but they can fulfil their role only if they become an interlocutor for the patient that remains the main actor and is in charge of choosing, with the help of the professionals, what the most suitable means are. Despite the support of highly trained medical doctors, nature remains the dominant regulator of our personal transformation.

What I described about health is also true for many fields of services or consumption. In a similar way education is based on the value of integration into the labour market. People are trained to fulfil specific functions like cogs in a gigantic machine. Education becomes the obligatory passage to get the necessary diplomas that will allow the graduate to become medical doctors or lawyers. This is probably this main message of a social hierarchy that needs to be conquered that school children learn from the educational system. Yet diplomas are only the signs that such a social promotion has nothing to do with knowledge. True knowledge helps the persons to identify their path, to grow into more mature beings. It is mainly based on the integration of the skills that allow learning by oneself. True learning happens everywhere when the child watches his parents prepare a meal or repair trousers or build a pizza oven, or watch the neighbour teach his skills in woodwork, the baker how he makes bread. One can only learn about nature while running between creek and bush, stopping to watch wildlife. Of course one should also learn foreign languages and mathematics and, for this, a teacher may be needed, but teaching happens mainly best “on the field”. It is probably what made the pedagogy of a Paolo Freire or Célestin Freinet so attractive and influential because it was anchored in real everyday life. What matters in education is not the social image it creates, it is the inner growth of the person; and of course this inner growth is not what the market wishes the most! Once again the image appears to have shifted to a false value.

Transports are another example of this overgrowth of a system because of an ill-adapted guiding image. Mobility is certainly a positive aptitude because it can create links. Yet when the image of speed and comfort invades the field of transports, whole regions collapse under the impact of centralised drainage by the most powerful centres. People are condemned to spend many hours a day

in public or private transports: exhaustion, accidents, stress, nonsense dismantle their lives. The network of transports is so overloaded that one risks one’s life if one tries to ride a bike or a slower car (like a solar car): mighty trucks and speedy cars will overrun the poor rider! Indeed mobility - as it is also the same for health or education - can remain something very modest and simple that escapes the pressure of any self-created image of false prestige. It should be simply the ability to reach once a week the next town at a reasonable speed to sell one’s pig and come back with the necessary goods that are not available locally.

38) The law of creation of poverty

Growth tends to concentrate on goods/services that serve the rich more able to consume them; they become inaccessible for the poor.

The law of creation of poverty, inspired once more by Illich, (inversion 38) says:

- Following the logic of market, institutions have the innate tendency to adapt the quality of their services to the demand made by the principal consumers, instead of aiming at remaining available for all, including the poorest, in equal ways. As the services tend to become products sold to consumers, the nature of these products evolves under the pressure of market and develops into something more sophisticated and more complete. By this shift in quality they become more elaborate, more expensive too, and it requires more complex conditions or more means to access them; therefore they become less accessible to the poorest part of the population. Sophistication creates poverty when it excludes people from a public service. In poor countries this difference is fundamental because it means that the majority of the population,

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or at least an important part of it, has no more access to these public services.

- Indeed public services are the most efficient when they remain simple, local and direct. Most needs (health, education, transports) are very basic and can be satisfied by very simple means. When these means remain simple, they also remain cheap and accessible for all.

Inversion: This is the role of public services to be accessible for all. Yet the more services develop, the more they become inaccessible for the poorest part of the population. The most basic services are the most efficient, but they have the tendency to evolve towards something more sophisticated that pleases richer people.

The best illustration of this trend is the example of the barefoot doctors that could deliver cheap and efficient care, even locally, on the working place. Or the Cuban doctors who have been important actors in the health system of South America, especially in what concerns the care for the poorest.

Fresh water, hygiene, composting toilets can be easily made available for larger groups of people and this would solve worldwide an important proportion of health issues. The investment in a minimum number of water taps or public toilets can change drastically the quality of life for a majority of poor people. This form of basic services is incredibly effective, because it focuses on the poorest. It does not mean that it should remain at this strictly elementary level.

The improvement of hygiene in the past century has brought much more health improvement for a large number of recipients than the development of more sophisticated medical techniques that concern only a small minority of health cases, and become only available for

a more restrictive income group. Our health system focuses on performance when it should widen its qualitative approach to health, rediscovering many traditional treatments and especially regaining a broader view of the many factors that affect life. So many contemporary illnesses are due to a modern way of life that has very little to do with humanity: pollution, stress, exploitation, intoxication of food, depreciation, etc. are many trends of our modern life that have developed mainly under the pressure of market and cause so many diseases. First priority is to eliminate these destructive trends.

The most shocking aspect of our present health system is the huge disparities of means between the care for rich and poor people. Rich Americans can spend more money for one single treatment than the budget of a whole hospital in Mali or Laos. And worse: the evolution towards more sophisticated treatments is more influenced by the buying power of these few rich Westerners than by the urgent needs of the poorest people in Africa or Asia. And it is evidently an illusion to say that both trends are not linked. It is all about sharing common resources for life.

On the other hand many treatments induce secondary effects that are as painful as the illness itself. Many treatments are given under the illusion of an improvement that never comes. Supporting the patient in his effort to wade peacefully through trial offers often more possibilities of wellbeing than excessive technical treatments. Our body is so much more than a machine! Less technology and more search or support for meaning would help many patients. And this quality of care can also be provided at home, by the direct social network. It is cheap, it is simple, and especially it is more human and it aims at the root of the disease. True efficiency is cheap and just!

39) The law of destruction of the coherence of traditional societies
Market introduces exploitation, colonisation, de-structuration, de-valorisation and seduction into traditional societies.

The law of destruction of traditional societies (inversion 39) says:

- The impact of market on traditional societies causes generally a deep destruction of the substance and structure of these societies which reveal themselves to be very fragile because they are originally organised in a way that allows adaptation to natural cycles and self-restriction in respect of a fragile environment. These trends are unknown of market economy and present an evident lack of resistance to more aggressive forces.
 - 1) Market economy is based generally on the consumption of natural resources which causes their exhaustion or pollution, or of workforce which provokes exploitation of people.
 - 2) It is based also on the import of new values which colonise the mentalities and replace the traditional values.
 - 3) It introduces new ways of functioning which generate de-structuration of the usual pattern of authority and responsibility.
 - 4) It brings new priorities which devalue the traditional ways of life and the indigenous spiritual representations.
 - 5) It introduces new items which become signs of power or prestige by their seductive appearance yet often empty content.
- Indeed traditional societies have accumulated in their past a very long, subtle and deep experience of their environment and ways of living which have proved very adapted to their context. The impact of market disturbs this balance and destroys an invaluable culture which has needed millennia to take shape.

Inversion: What is extracted from these traditional societies does not participate usually to their wellbeing – especially when it concerns

huge quantities of natural resources that could not be consumed by the traditional communities in that extend - but is generally exported to richer countries and leaves behind a kind of destroyed no-man's-land. What has been introduced is often badly integrated because of the superficiality of what has been brought in and the contextual de-structuration which accompanies the colonising process. Yet exchanges in diversity should bring enrichment to all participants. For this to happen, these exchanges must take shape in a more reciprocal form, in the respect of the identities and especially the fragilities of each partner.

I describe here the negative aspects of exchanges because it is what happens under the impact of a powerful market onto a more fragile society. This does not mean that any exchange is bringing total destruction. It means it does when the relationships are too asymmetrical. This is generally the case when the market is the leader, because market has no capacity for awareness or for the self-limitation which should ensue out of it.

Wherever the modern wider market implants itself, it will generate the disappearance of traditional know-how, ways of life and values. This is part of the flattening of landscape I have described before. Traditional ways of life are usually very fragile and do not resist comparison with the modern way of life. It does not mean that they are less adapted; it means principally that they are less seductive, probably because they rely more on simplicity, necessitate more effort, are less rewarding and less imposing in terms of prestige. Yet very often they are more subtle in many aspects because they relate less to the material and more to the emotional or spiritual level and they enhance more human values (hospitality, care, solidarity) than material belongings. They are therefore more complete.

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In traditional societies there are many customs that we consider as primitive. The question of what is primitive is not so simple: is the violence of our society not a sign of the primitive character of our culture? What is true development and what is the deep meaning of life? Some of these forms which seem to be restrictive are in fact the means for protection against more harming influences. It is evident that the market is not able to propose a mature model of society. It just undoes what is and replaces it with its own simplistic and materialistic values. It is important to make a clear distinction between the conquest of weaker societies by the market and the rich and subtle exchange which emphasises the best aspects of both traditional and western cultures.

40) The law of destruction of natural resources (environment)

The access to natural resources generates their exhaustion and the pollution or destruction of the environment until nothing is left.

The law of destruction of natural resources and the environment (inversion 40) says:

- Natural resources represent a considerable profit for mining or fuel companies or even for vast plantations. The market encourages their extraction without restriction, until they are exhausted. There is no ability of the market to respect the laws of nature or the rhythm of natural cycles. The speed of exploitation is dictated by the feasibility for extraction or by the range of the demand on the market. It becomes a priority to produce as much as possible, as quickly as possible, yet without provoking the collapse of prices. The capacity of nature to regenerate these resources is never considered. Once a site is exhausted, it is time

to move on to the next, most often even without restoring the previous site into clean state.

- Indeed resources and wastes are parts of long cycles which transform them into the resources of the next stage of consumption. The true leader is nature which regulates these cycles. Nothing can be done without respecting these rhythms and locations if there is an awareness that our survival depends on the way we are integrating into and adapting to these subtle processes.

Inversion: The market incites us to become wrongly the dominant leaders and decision takers in a process that is in fact on one hand already strictly defined by nature and on the other hand extremely restrictive and constraining by the laws of cycles, and to which we are meant to submit completely. The market creates an illusion of our all-power.

I have already mentioned this question of integration of all our activities into the quality, location and rhythm of natural cycles. This statement comes here on time because it shows the violence of our economic system that is not able to extract what we need and at the same time to respect the laws of nature. It knows only how to take until the resource is completely exhausted. Extraction means in this logic destruction of the site which is rarely restored to the original state: how could it be?

The same is also generally true for human resources. When fragile communities are integrated into the network of market forces, they usually collapse under the impact or lose their freedom and become a reservoir for workforce until this resource is exhausted too.

The neo-liberal economic system seems to be without restraint and to be the law of destruction because it cannot stop its action as long as the resource has not disappeared or become impossible or too expensive to exploit. The word “exploitation” means it all.

41) The law of globalisation and imbalance of exchanges

Globalisation aims at extending market to increase accumulation of wealth; yet it should care for compensating impoverishment.

The law of globalisation (inversion 41) says:

- Globalisation is the process of dismantling trade barriers in order to extend market possibilities. This is generally done under the initiative of the richest countries and corporations in an attempt to find new outlets to sell their goods and services or new sources to import natural resources or cheap goods from other countries or for investing more available capital abroad in order to take control of foreign corporations. Wealth in this way has the tendency to concentrate on the mightier side. It is evident that this process cannot be sustainable because wealth converges mainly towards the same centres of power and never flows back. Any such constant imbalance in the exchanges can only, on the long term, drain the poorer partners from their ability to be part of active exchanges or even just to consume, and, when the buying power becomes exhausted, there remain no more possibilities for further consumption or investment, except through credit. The exchanges dry out by lack of means - at the exception of extraction of resources that remains lucrative because they generally do not involve investment from the poorer side but only cheap workforce.

- Indeed the intensification and broadening of economic exchanges have to be necessarily accompanied by measures of compensation and stabilisation. The rule is that the exchanges should remain as balanced as possible if they have to last: compensation has to be made constantly for imbalances. Globalisation is not sustainable without a form of supervision to be institutionalised in order to keep the balance. This can be done by any form of increase in prices, in investments, in subsidies, transfer of resources of all types, as long as one cares that no new form of colonisation is established.

Inversion: To resist the tendency of free market to create major imbalances, a conscious form of planning and supervision, guided by a clear vision of justice and balance, has to provide the necessary means to remedy imbalances and to initiate movements of compensation.

Politics and ethics play here an essential role that is nowadays completely absent from international exchanges and from the present strategy of globalisation. The deep contradiction in the present trend for globalisation is that the privileged partners want the advantages (resources, profit, control, domination) without having to be responsible for the negatives effects of the system (degradation, destruction, penury and their consequences in terms of people migrations).

It is important to notice that a strict form of protectionism has allowed previously these richer nations and corporations that dominate the market to develop in past centuries their own businesses in a secure context sheltered from sharp international competition. Once they have had the opportunity to well establish their own strength, they become able to better compete and look for a wider

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market in order to increase their possibilities for selling their goods and services and in this way increasing their profit. Globalisation is always due to the initiative of rich countries and corporations because it profits the rich and strong at the expenses of the poor and weak.

The process I just described is made evident by the problem of the debt of the poorer countries or of the countries near bankruptcy. Either by lack of financial means and lack of cash that comes in or by excess of resources that come out without being paid for at the right price, these poorer countries have to borrow money. The more they borrow, the more they have to spend a bigger part of their financial means to pay interests. These compound interests participate in a still increased way to the imbalance and to the dominant flow of cash towards the centres of power. While the debt increases, the interest rates do the same and the draining flow of cash becomes exponential. On top of this, in most cases, the investments made with the borrowed capital profit mainly the corporations of the richer countries that have provided the funds, as this direct participation of external corporations is often part of the deal accompanying the credit. Not only the poorer partner suffers from an increased burden of debt but the expenses finance the activities of corporations that do not participate in the local economy and wealth (cash, jobs, incomes, education, knowledge, self-esteem, etc.).

Basically globalisation tends to extend the mobility of resources, of goods and of capital, but it refuses the mobility of people, especially if they come from poor countries. Migration is evidently a powerful means for compensating the differences of wealth as the wealthiest regions become the most attractive. Progressively, because it would generate a flow of people from the poorest to the richest regions, the free movement of people would soon be able to correct the imbalances generated by unequal economic exchanges of goods. But

these richer regions are very aware of protecting their borders. Western countries mainly accept the mobility of resources, goods, services and capital in an unrestricted measure, but they are extremely severe to protect their own borders and to prevent migrants from invading their space. There is evidently, in this discrimination and disparity, a fundamental injustice. Of course it is understandable that it is not easy to imagine a free politic of migration that would leave all the doors open. This extreme mobility would surely generate a lot of tensions in the welcoming countries. Yet the purpose of the present description is to emphasise how much the disparity of wealth is a true generator of migration, especially when the flow of refugees is still increased by the fact richer countries allow themselves to invade some weaker countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, and so many others or support dictatorships in countries such as Chile, Argentina, Indonesia, etc.) in order to defend their own agenda and economic interests.

It is important to see that migrations have been a permanent factor in history. These migrations have often participated in the wealth of the welcoming countries because it brings new know-how, new creativity and work forces. For western countries it would certainly nowadays participate in solving the problem of their aging demography. Some European regions that suffered from population loss, because of weak birth rate or emigration of their own population by lack of work, have tried to compensate this loss in welcoming migrants from non-European countries. One among many examples is the village of Riace in Calabria (Southern Italy). Their experience has been generally very positive because it has allowed these villages to revive and to become a buzz of activity of so many different trades and in the same time the refuge for people in need. Fear of the stranger develops essentially in our minds and has often little to do with reality. We all have the tendency to project onto the stranger the

image of a threat because we are awkward in coping with deep cultural differences and with the unknown. And we are probably also not very happy to share our wellbeing.

The principle of balance and compensation for economic exchanges is a fascinating objective that would care for the basic needs of all and especially help people to stay at home where they could find the necessary resources and good life conditions instead of dreaming of an Eldorado that exists nowhere. But this principle remains nevertheless very difficult to implement. Many factors play a role that are not easy to grasp and to handle:

- One of the first difficulties is how to evaluate the value of exchanges as the price is not a true measure - although the question consists here in how to manage cash flows generated by quantities of resources sold at a given price. Many resources leave the poorer country without even being valued, or at a ridicule price that has nothing to do with the true value that is extracted. This disparity of values explains also the imbalance.
- Another difficulty is the fact that no country is a homogenous actor. Some people are poor and others are rich. Some can benefit greatly from exchanges while the majority is exploited. The government itself is often struggling to get the necessary income to face its own duties in education, health and social care. The national balance of payments is therefore not always the most significant indicator.
- Compensation can be brought under so many varied forms that it is difficult to find the suitable ones that would profit everyone. Neoliberalism will mainly recommend investments in order to bring the poorer country to a higher level of industrial development or of economic integration, yet it would not necessarily meet the priorities of the concerned nation. Other

ways would consist in resource transfers that could include knowledge, services or infrastructure, with yet the same restriction concerning the choice of what has to be done.

- There are truly qualitative aspects concerning for instance how decisions are taken about what should be implemented. It seems evident that the actors (nations or corporations) who have to return a value to the source would probably promote solutions in their own interest or at least that correspond to their own positive perception. This form of cultural influence based on economic and cultural domination would inevitably generate a new form of colonialism hidden behind the good intentions of applying the principle of compensation.

I will not develop further the description of these many aspects because it is not here the place for such an extensive research and I do not have in any case the necessary knowledge to do so. The mention of this point is enough to make us aware of the importance of the problem and how market has inverted our human relationships.

42) The law of the shock doctrine

Any degradation of the economic situation of a country will be the opportunity to enforce more neoliberal and totalitarian domination.

The law of the shock doctrine, according to Naomi Klein, (inversion 42) says:

- The more a country sinks into desperate economic situation, the more it becomes the opportunity for drastic neoliberal measures that participate on one hand in reinforcing the domination by external powers and on the other hand in imposing totalitarian ways that increase the impact of free-market mechanisms and

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dismantle the capacity of the central government and democracy to assist the population with social measures.

- Indeed the impoverishment of a country is almost systematically used as an opportunity to reinforce foreign domination at the profit of free-market concentration of wealth and power. This goes in pair with the practice of totalitarian power, including social repression, imprisonment and torture. This does not evidently help the country to recover its own control in order to follow its own politics in democratic terms.

Inversion: These extreme measures imposed by foreign forces (institutions, governments, corporations) are always presented as a form of radical help for the suffering country. Yet it is only steered for the profit of powerful economic interests. The conditions of shock created by the extreme degradation of the situation are exploited and still reinforced by the measures of the treatment that establish a practically irreversible situation of domination that drains the country of more of its remaining wealth and capacity to react constructively.

This is the brilliant exposure by Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine*¹⁴ where she describes this increasing tendency of the international business, mainly supported by the US government, in establishing strong powers in countries such as Chile, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, Iraq, etc.

The neoliberal approach, based on the economic and political theses of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School, tends to extend its power and establishes conditions of international trades that extend the pressure of globalisation and prevent therefore the weakened countries to protect themselves or to resist this trend by keeping a

clear control on their internal social politic (control of prices, regulation, state interference, etc.).

Naomi Klein relates the facts of how it happened in the same way in South Africa, Poland, Russia and China. These very different examples have all in common the characteristic of being the theatres of the violent implementation of the neoliberal doctrine under conditions of shock.

43) The law of international (neoliberal) institutions

The main international dominating institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) impose conditions that serve the extension of free market.

The law of international neoliberal institutions (inversion 43) says:

- The conditions for globalisation and the generalisation of the neoliberal agenda are presented as being the only drastic possible answers to economic impoverishment. Strict remedies are imposed by the WTO, IMF, World Bank and the most powerful governments and are negotiated (or rather imposed) as conditions for international support, help, credits and hopes of further growth.
- Indeed these conditions and practices are all integral parts of the neoliberal agenda and participate in draining the obliged countries in a further way that deprives them from any possible means to follow their own democratic and social agenda.

Inversion: The international institutions such as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank are under the domination of neoliberal doctrine and serve free-market ideology instead of being at the service of the weakest and of providing support and help to design for these

¹⁴ Naomi Klein: *The Shock Doctrine, the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. 2007.

countries in difficulty a national future that could reinforce social measures, democracy and national empowerment, as the theories of Keynes would have encouraged it.

The main three conditions that these international institutions use to impose are:

- 1) Free trade and deregulation: All protections have to be removed and dismantled, whether they concern protectionism, human rights, ecology, social protection, price control, state intervention, government policies. This is the politics of laissez-faire.
- 2) Privatisation: Most public services have to be privatised, it means offered to private interests and sacrificed to the laws of profit.
- 3) Austerity: State intervention and social assistance or promotion of stimulating measures have to be abolished according to the motto “the free fox in the free chook pen”. Price control, unemployment benefits and social assistance have to be abolished. State expenses have to be reduced to nothing and do not allow intervention measures such as stimulating public investments.

Privatisation and austerity have become the two great mottos that summarise the solutions proposed to countries in difficulties. This means the total dismantling (and even privatisation) of the state and the reduction of any economic activity to its measure of the profit it allows acquiring. It is evident that the unilateral stand adopted by these powerful international institutions is basically ideological and has nothing to do with the effective range of possibilities offered by normal imagination and aspirations, not even with the conclusions extracted from previous experiences in identical operations.

The debate does not happen as if there were no possible alternative. There in English a very strange ambiguity. The word *liberal* means, in social term, freedom of spirit and a capacity to challenge the existing ideology and practice. Yet, from the economic point of view, the word *liberal* means free enterprise and free market. Capitalism seems in this way to be at the same time the way that offers freedom of spirit and freedom of enterprise. We all know that it is not true. It seems that the Anglo-Saxon culture has always been deeply impregnated by the belief in economic freedom since the Industrial Revolution. This confusion is probably the expression of a confusion between social freedom and economic laissez-faire or, if not, of a preconceived idea that freedom and capitalism go hand in hand. The present evolution and what has been said here above show that it is not the case. Yet the main Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, remain strong bastions and actors of this free-market ideology.

We have to learn to clearly distinguish ideology, free spirit and political strategy when it has to be applied in concrete conditions. When a local community achieves relative consensus concerning the values, the aims and the means of its social and political strategy, it has to relate to ideology and doctrine but it has to do so in a very concrete and visible frame, so that ideology does not become a totalitarian dominating model but on the opposite an inspiring teaching from the past that can be implemented in a sensitive and sensible way. Human values provide probably the right filters to measure the truth of ideology. When material interests become dominant, human values are squashed because they are recessive. It is why they need a special awareness and protection, it means a control of social awareness over economy.

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44) The law of democratic incompatibility

*Free market is said to be the way to democracy. Nonsense!
Freedom for all can only arise when market is under social control.*

The law of democratic incompatibility (inversion 44) says:

- Free market is always presented as the best way to democracy because it is said to be based on freedom and freedom is understood as the fundament for democracy. It is clear nowadays that the economic activities of most western democratic nations are based on free market principles and these nations tend to extend this practice into ever increased globalisation based on free market regulations.
- Indeed true democracy can only exist when equity and fairness are the main rules that regulate the economy. This form of regulations requires a form of control of economy by the local or national community according to ethical or political options that constrain economy to respect the rights of the weaker and to allow more equity and justice for all. Democracy appears in this way as the condition for a restriction of free market economy in order to allow more justice.

Inversion: The two forms of freedom to which it is referred here are indeed of very different types. On one hand freedom of market is only laissez-faire that allows the most powerful interests to dominate the game, to impose their conditions and to exploit circumstances to their own advantages. Free market contributes to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few instead of sharing wealth among a maximum number of participants. On the other hand democracy tries to empower all citizens to express their opinion and to control what happens in their community, whether on the local or the national level. True democracy is more than a system. It is indeed a fragile

culture that requires that transparency prevails, that issues are debated in a fair way, that information is provided to all actors, that argumentations are fair and truthful, that opinions can be expressed freely, that consensus can arise among actors of different opinions thanks to social maturity and an ability of each actors to accept compromises, that measures can be taken to control the most powerful actors and allow equity to be maintained.

Democracy is a culture more than an institution. It requires a common will to search for truth and equity. This condition is evidently not fulfilled by free market economy. It requires to be protected because true democracy is very fragile. Fairness, free information, true debate, diversity of ways of expression, ability for consensus despite opposed points of view are all very fragile qualities that can only be protected when the local community is mature enough to see the indescribable advantage of valuing this qualities above all.

Only real practice can enforce these privileged conditions and the regular social experience of this special quality is the only way to convince all actors that this game is worth being played. Democracy is a culture that grows as love does in a family. The core of this different practice relies on the regular experience that competition is not the best way but that cooperation and sharing provide more wealth (material and spiritual) for all.

This is evidently a path that is contradictory to free market because it is a path lead by the mature intuition and discovery of what matters in life.

45) The law of enslavement of the client to corporation's interests
The client is no more a king but the slave of the interests of the corporation; his needs are only considered to keep him as a buyer.

The law of enslavement of the client to corporation's interests (inversion 45) says:

- Some fifty years ago, corporations were proud to say that the client was the king; everything was done to satisfy his needs. This was considered as the right means for corporations to keep a good share of the market. Nowadays the situation has changed much. What counts is the quantity of sales, at the lowest possible quality and at the lowest price because it is the way corporations can increase their profit. Products are not meant to be useful and to last but to be thrown away and bought again new. Products are designed to make the client dependent on the brand he has chosen and to force him to buy more. Computers create a form of dependence where software is constantly adapted, making old versions incompatible.
- Indeed technology should be at the service of the user. It would make it possible for appliances to serve for long decades, and for software to remain compatible, and tools to last for life. Tools including computers do not change drastically. What people did 10 or 20 years ago is mainly what they still do with their personal tools or computers, except maybe a few improvements and most fashionable uses. This evolution of increasing dependency on new products is tragic because our activities lose their meaning and we become collectively slowly depressed.

Inversion: Economic activities, instead of aiming at serving the true needs of people and the harmony of our collective growth, have focused on profit and therefore transformed their purpose. They are

working as in a vicious circle, producing only in the purpose of having to produce more and to get more cash in. All means are allowed. Clever is the one who invented the best trick how to cheat people! Consumers have become the slaves of corporation interests.

It is important to see that, as consumers, we are in fact encouraging this evolution because we are the ones who buy the products. Without our participation this evolution would not be possible. We have a powerful might for veto which we never use, because we are greedy to get what is available, or more exactly what others have (mimesis again!). If others would not update all the time, we would feel freer not to. Or more exactly our freedom not to participate remains integral, except when it is for our survival.

Many processes in economic activities are fully automated. When I ring my phone company, I cannot speak with anybody I talked to the day before. I get first a recorded message that redirects me to a service settled in the Philippines or in India, if I'm lucky enough to press the right digit and if I'm not sent in circle from one to the other; I do not have any more the possibility to talk with the local contractor who will execute the job I request. Computers control us, as tools of a general centralisation that is implemented in the search for an illusory profit that is evidently constantly escaping because of the patent inefficiency of such an automated system. The only efficiency of this system is its inefficiency when it discourages naturally the client to contact the service which becomes unreachable, saving in this way costs of staff. Where is humanity gone?

Another aspect of this evolution is that it destroys possibilities for repair of the goods we use regularly and that satisfy us. This means a lot of waste, because most items are no more designed to be repaired or even designed to be impossible to repair. Beyond the waste of

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resources, of energy, of human creativity, it is also the loss of many trades which used to focus on repair: the shoemaker, the local shop for electronic or electrical goods which used to repair our kitchen appliances, our stereo, even our computer, etc.

46) The law of complexity at the cost of control by community

The multiplicity of external actors makes the local situation more difficult to understand; complexity is a factor of colonisation.

The law of complexity at the cost of the control by the local community (inversion 46) says:

- The opening of the local community to external actors under the pressure of market economy, globalisation, automation and centralisation, creates a situation which becomes more and more complex, not only because of the increasing number of actors but also because of the increasing and conflicting diversity of their motivations and actions. It is therefore more difficult to understand what is happening, or identify the different processes and their causes, or the actors who are involved and the aim they are pursuing. At the same time it becomes more difficult for the members of the community to become aware of what happens, to achieve consensus in the community, to find remedies to the distortions that the market never misses to generate in the local network of relationships. And it seems impossible to start a move towards remedying these imbalances.
- Indeed the local community has originally a form of inner coherence and visibility, or readability, which makes its functioning understandable, especially because of its small scale and the reduced number of the actors involved, that everybody knows.

Inversion: The increasing complexity under the influence of market, does not exclude richer and more diversified forms of opening. The process of penetration reinforces a form of colonisation by external actors and complexity acts as a veil which prevents a clear sight and a mature and healthy counter reaction. The difficulty is to protect the initiative and identity of the local group, which relies principally on their capacity for awareness and consensus.

The involvement of external actors can provide of course very rich openings but their interference is always justified by their own interest. A conflict soon arises between local interests and external forces, between also the advantages of opening to external influences and the negatives impacts of such influences, from the point of view of the members of the community. In these two antagonistic movements of opening and of preservation there is no real equilibrium, especially because the external forces are often dominant ones, as parts of bigger corporations or of wider national or international trends.

Protectionism is basically a reflex of self-defence that is necessary to protect a weaker natural and social environment from external aggression but this form of protection does not plead for a tendency to self-enclosure as a form of ghetto. The necessity for protection is rather the question of the relative power of the forces in game, in order to control the degree of reciprocity that can be maintained and can allow a better equilibrium. In case of equilibrium, forces are more equal and in harmony and do not provoke inner destabilisation as it is the case when domination becomes the major factor. Exchanges can then develop as true exchanges between more or less equal parties.

John Maynard Keynes wrote: “I sympathise with those who would minimise economic entanglements among nations. Ideas, knowledge, hospitality, travel – these are things that of their nature should be international. But let goods be homespun wherever it is reasonable and conveniently possible, and above all, let finance be primarily national.”

47) The law of whitewashing and corruption

The market cleans the products from all traces of suffering, exploitation and destruction which characterise their production.

The law of whitewashing and corruption (inversion 47) says:

- The transformation of most goods is marked by circumstances of natural and human exploitation, by environmental deteriorations, by work conditions that lack social protection or simple human respect. It means that these goods are shaped by processes which are very often destructive and their repackaging in the form of innocent objects hides their perturbed origin. This is a form of whitewashing that hides the corruption incorporated in these goods and helps us to buy them without afterthought.
- Indeed we all know that the clean and immaculate products we find on the shelves of our supermarkets are only a false appearance and we guess more or less what the human or natural cost paid by others and elsewhere has been, in order for us to be able to buy them. Evidently it always troubles us a bit but we are quick to reject any thought on this topic because we are reticent to trouble our peace of mind, and we are keen to get the product we are coveting.

Inversion: The anonymity of market allows the whitewashing of the goods, and the whitewashing allows corruption and exploitation to last and even to grow in order to provide more profit under more unclear circumstances. When the consumers become aware of what is intentionally hidden from them, they can react and collect more information about the conditions of transformation which have given shape to the goods they consume. Different systems of labels exist today which guarantee the respect of forest, the bio nature of food, the protection of children against work exploitation, the just conditions of fair trade and balanced exchanges, or similar social and ecological labels.

When consumers are concerned, they can exert a very powerful control on the conditions of transformation of the goods and services which are delivered to them. Boycott actions allow citizens and consumers to express their opinion, inasmuch as trade relies in fact on consumers. When consumers-citizens awake and decide to have an influence, they can reconquer an important power of control and even of promoting just solutions.

But who wants to and who cares?

48) The law of virtuality

The action of market is based on virtuality: the creation of false illusions or hopes, to manipulate, divert attention, hide corruption.

The law of virtuality (inversion 48) says:

- As the intention of market is to get a maximum profit from what it has to sell to people, all means are directed onto transforming the perception people have of their needs in order to create a

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fictive world in which they discover unknown desires. The strategy is not about the needs of people but about the values which can convince people to desire what is on offer. Competition and mimesis, as it has been said, are the main factors of this race for goods and publicity has learned to play on the virtual aspiration of each of us for false values like everlasting youth, prestige, power, wealth, success, pleasure.

- Indeed our true needs are never concerned but only our ability to be influenced, i.e. our own fragility, our ability to be destabilised, our doubts about our own identity and how we fit into the social context, how much we are loved, recognised and respected. This can be only done in creating a virtual world which has only very little to do with reality and true necessity. In fact the least this virtual world can be tested, the best the chances of publicity are to succeed.

Inversion: The goods hide their true nature through whitewashing and can be dressed by all our false hopes. Manipulation is the main tool of the market, because, far from reality and confrontation with materiality, it can cheat and create fiction. The computer world in which we live ever more is a kind of closed circuit which has created its own laws; these have little to do with what one can observe in nature or in the world of matter which does not allow virtuality and cheating, but confronts us with the true laws of nature: cycles, limitation, human dignity, true meaning of what is acted out.

The virtuality of our modern society is a wide topic we cannot exhaust in a few sentences. What is essential here, about market, is how it creates this virtuality because it is the only way it can manipulate people. When traditional women in India unite their forces to combat Coca-Cola or the project of dam on the Narmada River, it is not astonishing that these are women who react, because

they do not accept nonsense and do not accept themselves to be taken where they do not want to. Our resistance against virtuality has little to do with our objective power. It has much more to do with our own capacity to remain free of thinking independently and seeing what is, far from the illusions and dreams of virtuality, especially when virtuality is manipulated to extract from us what vested interests want to exploit. And it is evident that women are much more naturally gifted for this game of discerning than men.

49) The law of the haze and the tortoise (neo-liberalism)

All, whether poor or rich, run the same race: no consideration for inequalities in health, education, wealth, tools, climate, politics.

The law of the haze and the tortuous (inversion 49) says:

- The practices of market economy are exacerbated by neo-liberalism which wants to promote a completely free market economy where everybody, indifferently of their life conditions, social and natural context, education, health, wealth, has to compete with everybody. Man has to become a wolf for man. Competition is the basic principle: all run the same race. The poor Malian farmer who cultivates his small field in an arid context without any support from the state has to compete on the market with the US farmer, who is supported by consistent state subsidies and works with powerful machinery in a fertile region.
- Indeed conditions through the world are so diversified that it is not possible to have the same rules for all. This would be the so-called principle of the free fox in the free chook pen! This is how free market ensures the mighty to dominate the poor, the rich to become ever richer and the poor poorer. Protections must allow any weaker economy to develop in a sane context. National or

regional communities have to establish these protections and especially give themselves the necessary tools to control and restrain the excesses of economic activities. The hare and the tortoise have to go each one at their own speed!

Inversion: In a mature community, the social dimension must encompass and control the economic one. This is probably the missing bolt (this is a big one!) in our modern society. We refuse to harness economy although it is necessary to do so in the name of humanity. We refuse to see that a thriving humanity would inevitably have a thriving economy. The contrary is not true, as the practice proves it.

This is in fact the role of politics to find ways to control the major damaging forces in order to preserve or restore more harmony. Without this courageous will there is no real politics, or it suits only the interests of a minority. Politics is the art of bringing equality and equal chances for the wellbeing and the expression of all. Politics is about sharing the common wealth and offering happiness to all of us, poor and rich. This requires a mature and generous collective vision for a balanced future.

50) The law of all inversions (summary)

The role of economy is to satisfy the needs of all. Yet false premises (false beliefs) have deterred exchanges from doing so.

The law of all inversions (inversion 50) - that deals as a summary for all of the previous inversions I have described - says:

- Our economic exchanges and relationships are principally shaped and governed by the interests and objectives of the dominant

economic powers, i.e. managed by the main actors who control the major instruments of influence on the market. Detaining capital (accumulated wealth as financial means or as imbedded investments in infrastructure) is the principal means to acquire power. Based on these premises our western global economic system is guided by a few fundamental principles. The first one is that the general economic balance and health of a country depends on the success of the activities of its dominant powers (i.e. most powerful corporations); and average people, who form the bulk of the workforce and the consumers, will profit of this success through the so-called trickle down principle. Our social order is shaped by the forces of economy and regulated by the laws they have established through their action; it means that economic constraints are the dominant factors that shape all other fields of social interaction.

- Indeed, as we have seen previously, these principles are all false premises. The true basic role of economics is that it has to organise exchanges between people and between people and their surroundings in a way that allows everyone to satisfy their needs and keeps the environment in good health. Needs are varied and of different natures, and of different priorities. Once basic material needs are covered, immaterial needs (ethics, knowledge, justice, harmony, love) become the priority. Therefore the principal aim of a society should be to master economic forces in order to orient them towards the general good.

Inversion: The summary of the summary is the following: shall we satisfy true needs, i.e. needs with their extremely wide range from material to spiritual, or shall we just accept to be dominated by greed, i.e. the desire for profit and speculation.

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The choice is simple: true needs or speculation? While need can be described as what is necessary for life, speculation can be defined as any strategy or attempt to get more from what is offered. Because, all of us, we are not born nor living in similar and equal conditions, differences and disparities arise that offer more means to some of us than to others. This form of inequality or diversity can be used to take advantage of exchanges – they do not need to be material – to extract the maximum of wealth from others, for personal purpose. This is what happens in our system and a complex discourse has been built around this practice to justify and maintain it; to avoid this terrible and harmful inversion that deprives so many people of the minimum they need for surviving (60% of the world population live on only 6% of global wealth), this is the role of each social and natural community (local, regional, national) to ensure that exchanges develop in an equal and just way and that they profit the whole community, in harmony with the environment. Instead of letting economic forces lead our evolution, we have to take control of these forces to re-orient them towards the common good.

Resources are limited in a limited world; most of them are common to all, such as air, water, life, love, knowledge, heritage, know-how, common vision for the future, etc; these resources cannot be produced but only transformed; they have to be shared for the wellbeing of all, in justice and equity; they have to circulate freely and remain accessible for all; equilibrium in relation with the natural environment is the basic law, as we all depend on the health of the natural cycles and of the main regulating systems (climate, oceans, forests, deserts, etc).

Our western world suffers from a distorted anthropology. The main rule (or belief) that economic welfare brings happiness translates into many secondary principles (or secondary beliefs), such as: the aim of

an economic activity is basically to provide profit; one becomes wealthy by accumulating profit; material wealth provides power, social recognition and personal self-esteem; the market is the institution which regulates the exchanges of all components of production: i.e. resources, goods, workforce, knowledge, capital, land, infrastructure, that are all considered as items to be acquired on the market in exchange of an amount of money (price); the market is a self-regulating institution, i.e. it brings all these very diverse elements into balance; competition is necessary to generate quality, to satisfy demand and to eliminate unnecessary actors; constant growth is needed to generate more profit for more people; speculation is the clever art to make big profits; production has to increase and demand has to be fostered in order for the system to function healthily; needs are infinite and the more needs we have, the more happy we are; etc.

As it has been said earlier, the control of these economic forces is the role of politics, i.e. of a democratic culture that needs to be alive and mature, principally in the local community where it happens and remains most perceptible (yet also on regional, national and international level), based on a consensus for a common social vision of the future.

This is a very different approach from the present one we are accustomed to. We need for this to become rooted in the a new anthropology (another understanding of the meaning of life), reinvent new means of consensus, and imagine new ways how to implement a form of development based on human values more than on material greed, unrestrained exploitation and sterile accumulation.

This is what I will try to describe in the next chapter, in the limits of my abilities.

4) THE NEW WAY

After having shown how market economy has perverted human economic activities and the true value of work which should remain an expression of so many aspects of our personal and social life, we have to draw the main lines of another understanding of the role of economy and show how it could take shape in a near future. As mind and spirit are the leaders of what we do with our lives, in our relationships with other human beings or with all other living beings, and also in our struggle with matter, it is essential to start at the core of the project, i.e. at the source of the leading paradigm.

A fundamental and spiritual choice

Before I describe the paradigm, I will explain the path we will take. It will be a mythical approach because myth is better suited to express the symbolic aspects of life as it uses metaphors instead of trying to describe what cannot be expressed. This mythical approach will be inspired by the Christian tradition, with the metaphor of the Trinity or the Godhead (or what one calls God or the Ground of Being or Emptiness or Brahman or Ultimate Reality or...). First let's compare here two possible approaches of the Godhead:

1) Eastern religions have focused on describing preferably the path of spiritual search rather than the nature of the Godhead that is the focus of this search. It gives mainly instructions concerning the practice that will allow the followers to discover the Reality which is beyond any possible representation. It is focused on the "how to get there" rather than on the "who" or on the "what" that remains the target. In this way it provides the followers with the necessary tools to experiment, through their own regular practice,

what is taught and to discover their path by themselves when guided by the teacher or the teaching.

2) In a way which seems opposed but reveals itself indeed very complementary to this approach, the prophetic religions such as Christianity have focused their teaching on the description of the nature of the Godhead: who is God? The attempt to describe the fathomless Reality is a great risk because the invisible Reality cannot be seen and cannot be described. The description can only lead to the creation of false representations and of idols. God is in no way like the representation we have made of Him or Her. Yet this narrow and risky path of description can be very rich, especially when it is lead in the spirit of the Eastern apophatic tradition which does not say clearly what is but only suggests or indicates. The finger only shows the direction in which to search and the teaching (the finger) is not the truth itself which remains always hidden and impossible to grasp; the finger shows only the path. It is the reason why the theological description uses mainly metaphors and symbols because the deep nature of the Godhead cannot be expressed with words. It is why also myths, metaphors and parables are so important in the Christian teaching as they can express many aspects of truth without imprison it into narrow descriptions. In this search too, the practice remains the necessary complement to the teaching as practice constitutes the true path on the spiritual quest.

To describe the new paradigm of economics that I believe to be life giving, I will adopt the second path (the mythical path) and I will start from the metaphor of the Trinity which is the core of the Christian tradition and attempts to express the true nature of life. I will show that our society, in opposition to this first Christian metaphor of life, has created an antagonist materialist model which I call Anti-Trinity and which is the complete negation of the Christian

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Trinity. It finds its expression in the three main components of our western society: power, technology and market.

My intention in introducing here this model and its counter model is not to preach a Christian truth but to let us be inspired by an understanding of life that is very liberating, especially because it shows a way out of the oppression of the second model. You will notice that the image of the Trinity plays here a role that is similar, in a way, to many Greek myths such as the myths of Prometheus or of Oedipus: it tells something that cannot be expressed in another form than mythical.

Trinity and Anti-Trinity

Our modern society adores its Anti-Trinity (Power-Technology-Market), a negation of the true Trinity (Life-Incarnation-Love).

It is fascinating to observe how the false Anti-Trinity created by our modern society is a kind of pejorative caricature or a sort of reductive idol which represents the values of our materialistic culture. It constitutes in each of its aspects an exact negation of the Christian Trinity that is intrinsically a symbol and expression of life. Let's describe both models, starting with the Christian one:

- 1) As everybody knows, the Christian Trinity describes God as three persons in one Unity: it is composed of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. By analogy, as it is a single unity composed of three persons, it may also be described basically like the three different natures of the fire which yet remains one single entity: energy + light + heat, in the equation $3 = 1$. It means that the Godhead is composed of three persons and yet remains One.

- a) 1st person: the Father is the invisible energy of the fire, the source and force of life which gives himself freely and animates everything. He is the Origin.
- b) 2nd person: the Son is the light of the fire, the incarnation which makes the Father (the energy of the fire) visible; the Son gives himself, in humility and gentleness, to reveal the Source. He is the Expression.
- c) 3rd person: the Spirit is the heat of the fire, the energy of love which unites everything and inspires us on the path of the search for Truth. He is the Movement.

It happens that these three persons are called today by names in the masculine form. This is very disturbing because these entities are indeed as much feminine as masculine; the three of them are yin and yang in equal measures. The Hebrew and Greek traditions - that were shaped on the patriarchal model of the early centuries - have distorted these images and narrowed the extent of their true identities in giving them dominant masculine attributes, except for the third one that had a feminine name in Hebrew (ruah) yet neuter in Greek.

- 2) The Anti-Trinity of our materialistic society is also composed of 3 elements, of 3 idols which are also leading forces, yet of very different natures:
 - a) 1st idol: Power, as a force of domination, exploitation and destruction.
 - b) 2nd idol: Technology, as a force of control and manipulation.
 - c) 3rd idol: Market and Consumption, as a force of greed, accumulation and retention.

By essence the Christian Trinity is a metaphor for the true nature of life understood as a spiritual reality that leads the evolution of the

whole cosmos since the beginning of the world. This evolution is not understood as the fruit of chance and necessity. The diversified forms of life we know (from the bacteria to the whale and the bird or the human being) are not coincidences but the fruits of a trend of purposeful transformation under the guidance of a spiritual energy that leads evolution and can be called Ultimate Reality, Emptiness, Allah, God, Ground of Being or else. As such this energy incarnates itself into matter but yet remains fundamentally an invisible spiritual entity; it is love and relates to each of us in a personal way. This rich metaphor of the Trinity describes the sacred reality and teaches us how to live. It tells us that life is not about accumulating more material goods but about giving oneself into the flow of creation and transformation, to be united with the source of all life and to be solidary of our brothers and sisters, the other human beings. Life in this sense is a subtle energy which animates us and leads us to find peace and joy, whatever happens to us, when we learn to let go and trust. This model of life leads us to freedom and true living. It is not a force that freezes us but an energy that moves us and leads us through transformation until we find the way of expressing our true vocation. It is evident that the content of this message could also be expressed with others means that are not related to the myth of the Trinity. It is what other traditions do in their own language and myths; it is also what some philosophies attempt to do.

The materialistic Anti-Trinity is completely the opposite of this generous movement of life. It is completely materialistic and egocentric. It aims at controlling, dominating, exploiting, accumulating. Instead of a living flow, it is a sclerotic obsession of oneself which prevents life, transformation and perception of a wider reality.

Let's now examine these three persons of the Trinity, and their materialistic counterparts, in more detail. This description will allow us to better grasp what is at stake in our economic activities.

1) Father vs Power

While the Father is the energy of life that gives himself freely, Power is a means to conquer and dominate, to oppress and destroy.

If we compare now the Father, 1st person of the Trinity, with the Power, 1st idol of the Anti-Trinity, we have the following contrast:

- First person of the Trinity, the Father is the energy of the fire, the energy of life. He is not the bearded nasty fellow who sits on a cloud and wants to punish us, as it has been too often represented. No, he is invisible, like the wind, but yet real. He is the Creator, not so much because he made the Earth and the Universe in seven days (this is a metaphor), but principally because he is the source of all life, the strength of love, the deep nature and consciousness of everything that exists. He is the energy and life which supports everything. Without him, everything returns to nothingness. He gives himself unconditionally, yet he leaves us free to choose to recognise him, to accept him in our lives or to ignore him. He does not impose himself. He is all powerful but remains discrete, hidden in a way which remains yet always accessible. Like our own heart he is not visible but essential for maintaining us in life. He is invisible like the wind which cannot be seen but can be noticed and observed through its effects. If we let him do, he nourishes our lives, lifts us, guides us, inspires us. He is the meaning of our own evolution that we have to trust because it will lead us to peace and joy. When we trust in him and let him guide

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our lives, his power of life (which is not imposing) can flow through our presence, to be given to others.

- By contrast, and completely at the opposite, the 1st idol of the Anti-Trinity is Power. This is also the energy which believes to lead our world, but it is only an illusion, although very harmful and in this way nevertheless real. Power wants to dominate; it uses violence to achieve its ends. It wants to be in control, to use people and all kinds of resources to its own advantage. It is completely obsessed by oneself. It is the centre to which everything should converge. Force and violence are the main tools of its implementation. Its violence is assimilated with civilisation and material development as if violence were a sign of maturity. Power is based on fear and suspicion. It is in this way the opposite of love.

These two persons of these opposed trios are very much in contrast to one another. In our western culture we are very fascinated by Empires. We believe the Babylonian, the Egyptian, the Roman and the Chinese Empires were great stages of civilisation because they accumulated great wealth, built great cities and they were all dominating powers which spread war and conquered in order to exploit their neighbours. We are obsessed by this image of power which conquers and imposes itself. The British Empire conquered the world because they had good ships, good weapons and less moral restraint, not because they were wise and gentle and generous, caring for the wellbeing of all. It is interesting to notice how this image of power fascinates us and prevents us from seeing what it was truly.

By contrast traditional cultures seem dull because they are usually materially not so impressing. They practise a kind of gentleness in their relationships between people and with nature. They do not do this only by ideal, although there is certainly a great part of spiritual

awareness in this attitude, but also mainly by lack of more powerful means. Yet we can feel how there is a great quality and harmony in this more simple way of life. The myth of the wise savage is not born out of nothing, but out of our intuition that there is in these societies a quality we often dream of, although they are far from being perfect. They practise a human scale which our modern way of life does not know anymore; they do not destroy their environment as we do but live (or leave what is) in a better form of harmony with nature than we do, in a form of self-restraint. They do not work in generally dehumanised conditions for an abstract income but seem to work essentially for their subsistence, yet often in harsh conditions that have nevertheless a meaning. Many exchanges take place in a more natural way, without using money as an intermediary. They have rather developed ways of reciprocity, more than we are capable of. We know that despite these qualities these traditional societies are not an ideal model, but we know also that they have nevertheless kept alive something in their humanity and small scale we have lost and this model awakes in us a form of nostalgia. In fact they practise a human quality that we are mainly still capable of experimenting only in the reduced intimate circle of our families. They practise it; this is culture. We talk about it; this is civilisation. Who is primitive?

The Father figure in the Trinity is in this way a powerful challenge. Although he is all powerful because he is the energy and essence of everything, he remains hidden because it is his way to remain discrete, not to impose himself. His power is gentle; it is offered but never forced upon us. The signs of his presence are everywhere in everything, if we learn to identify him, in the beauty and the marvel of what surrounds us. But we got too much accustomed to these marvels. We are no more aware of our breath, of our skin, of the beat of life in us, because we have known it for ever since we lived. This great discretion is the true power of love which does not expect

anything in return, yet the presence of this force of love is constant, like the pumping of our heart. This form of power relies on inspiration and not on oppression. It is all directed toward the wellbeing of all others, in no way egocentric. Therefore it is a force of liberation, of growth into maturity, of deep transformation, instead of being the power which reduces, oppresses, retains, extracts. The Father image is the figure of our own evolution towards light.

2) Son vs Technology

While the Son is expression, incarnation that makes love visible, Technology imposes itself as manipulation that shapes the world.

If we compare now the Son, 2nd person of the Trinity, with the Technology, 2nd idol of the Anti-Trinity, we have the following contrast:

- Second person of the Trinity, the Son is the light of the fire, the expression which makes the invisible visible. Since the beginning of the world he has been the transformation of what cannot be seen into what can be perceived. He is the expression of creation into signs and matter. He is by excellence the expression of love, the true love which helps to grow, to become more real and mature, more aware and integrated into the general movement of creation of the cosmos. Light makes things visible. Shadow is what remains where light does not shine. The man Jesus is only the human figure who incarnated the person of the Son into a human being, in a certain time in history, two thousand years ago. By giving himself he made the generosity of the Father perceptible as well as his own because they are united in one will. He made known that the Father is a gentle power who gives himself. He did this not so much by obedience to the Father but

because he is of the same nature as the Father and he is therefore love too. He gave himself of his own will because it is his true nature, and it is also our true nature that he reveals to us. The Son is present in us, in our surroundings, in nature because these material realities (nature as much as us) are expression of who the invisible Reality is, as we are also in our essence the expressions of this true love that needs to find ways of expression. He is the Revelation. The deep change happens in us when we understand the nature of his gift. He is Action. Salvation is nothing else than this transformation in ourselves of the perception of what is the sacred and true dimension of life, and of ourselves, and of the others.

- By contrast, and completely on the opposite, the 2nd idol of the Anti-Trinity is Technology. It is based on domination, and in this way the second idol is also expression of the first (Power), but, instead of giving and revealing, it aims at domination and control because of greed, because of a need to shape the world to our own desire. Technology makes of us takers: it aims at comfort without effort. It is based on virtuality: how to create a bubble of comfort which is not confronted with the harsh reality of the real world and which allows us to avoid effort, concentration, clear-sightedness, growth in maturity, all things that are required from us by the real world but that we do not want because we do not know where they lead us. We have indeed lost the trust in life, because sheer power has replaced the trustful Father. Technology is believed to be the sign of real development. It is, despite of its true potential for creativity, indeed too powerful for our degree of knowledge. We are too ignorant of the laws of the cosmos to be able to master technology. We use it as a toy which is more effective in its hidden consequences than we think. Hence we mess up the world, and we find only one solution: to use more technology to solve the problem created by technology. Hence

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more problems. Without inspiration (Spirit), there is in technology no light, no revelation, only darkness, because it is unable to propose solutions; it is only a means to an end. The end is essential, and it needs to be defined by our Spirit, our capacity to be in tune. Only when this aim is wisely defined, then the means can find an adequate use and become true creativity.

We want to be the semi-gods who can also create and shape our surroundings. But we do not know what we do, because we lack the wider picture. It is why we destroy nature, we exploit people, we create victims, we generate more destruction than we wish to. Our main problem is the illusion that we believe to be able to see what is; but the true Reality is invisible because it is immaterial. How does one fight against the wind? Constantly it pushes us back or diverts our efforts, and we do not understand why. We are decided to change our environment in order to make it more habitable, more comfortable, more suitable to our taste. In this way we have chosen to adopt a stand of conflict against the environment, against nature, against our own society, against our fellow humans. We declare war and we are astonished to collect violence.

Technology is meant to link people: cars, planes, phones, TVs, internet... Yet people have never been so isolated in their deep being. People who sit around a fire and tell each other stories are more linked than people who chat on internet or watch TV. This is evident and yet we persist doing the same thing. We persist buying TVs and spending time in front of computers because we believe it brings happiness. The fact is that technology isolates. It isolates us first from our surrounding: when we drive or we sit inside our well heated houses, we are no more in tune with the rhythms of the environment. Yet nature is our guide and teacher in our search for the true nature of God and we need to remain in touch with its energy to be lead on the

right path. To be warm is not bad as such and technology has allowed many improvements in our way of life. It is evidently not a bad thing in itself, but we have to learn how to use it in a mature way without becoming the slaves of it. With a hammer one can break the head of one's neighbour or build a house. The choice is ours.

In fact the truth is that we have to adapt to the world as it is. We have to accept the laws of the cosmos, to learn to decipher them and to change our ways of life in order to adapt and be in harmony with what is given. It does not mean we become passive and do nothing. Adaptation is a very active attitude which needs to learn how to listen, to observe, to discern. We do not have to become the creators of a new and different world. The present world is in fact perfect if we learn to adapt to it and live in harmony with it. The essential is not our action: what we do; but our attitude: how we perceive the world in both its subtle and material dimensions and the quality of the energy which animates us.

And this attitude may only be non-violent. We believe that our violence is an answer to the violence in the world, but in fact it is our violence which triggers violence in the world. We are scared and we learn to act violently when we are not sure of how to behave. Our own fear is the source of our own violence. And violence is never a solution because it only generates more violence, in an unending spiral of destruction. The difficulty in conflict is to be able to escape this cycle of violence and to create more peaceful conditions. This is our initiative and responsibility. Without this courage to break the cycle of violence and to start to trust, even with great cautiousness, there is no solution for conflicts.

The person of the Son is a great challenge and support in this process of understanding the true nature of the world because he is the

Revelation. He proposes a fundamentally different attitude: the choice of love, of simplicity, of forgiveness, of surrender. He chooses to be on the side of the victim and not the oppressor. It is not a theoretical discourse but a practical way of giving himself without restraint. In the choice between killing and being killed he chooses the latter. It is not because of a morbid taste for suffering, but an acceptance of this suffering because he knows that life is broader than what we experience of it, and that love is the core. Better to remain faithful to true love than to save one's skin. This non-violent choice for life is the revelation of our fundamentally violent reaction to conflicts, of our basically murderous attitudes. The killing of Jesus has not been anything else than a murder, the murder of an innocent. This opens an incredibly new and powerful door on a completely other way to behave towards others. And we know we can rely on the energy of the Son to start a move in this direction.

3) Spirit vs Market

While the Spirit is energy of love which inspires and unites, Market is a force of greed, fear, accumulation, exclusion, violence.

If we compare now the Spirit, 3rd person of the Trinity, with the Market, 3rd idol of the Anti-Trinity, we have the following contrast:

- Third person of the Trinity, the Spirit is the heat of the fire. He is the energy of love which moves creatures forward and inspires them in their choices, in their being, in finding the right attitude. The power of the Spirit is a unifying force which creates Unity beyond differences and complementarity. Love is the linking force between antagonistic tendencies. Antagonisms are necessary to keep the balance, hence the difficulty of keeping the whole together in a balance between attracting and antagonistic

forces. For instance the arm has two muscles which work in antagonistic ways, yet the arm remains one because the antagonism is kept in balance by the sense of equilibrium. On the other hand, the Spirit is also the energy of transformation because life is constant change. Nothing lasts, nothing remains, all is flowing. Transformation is growth in maturity and awareness, adaptation to the flow of life. Like the wind, the Spirit is leading us where we go, without us knowing where. He is the guide on our spiritual path.

- By contrast, and completely at the opposite, the 3rd idol of the Anti-Trinity is the Market. This is the energy which leads us in this materialistic world. Our motivation is centred on, and limited to, ourselves. Market and consumption are means for accumulation and retention, for competition and exploitation. This is a war of us against the others, based on violence. There is no self-restraint, no sharing. We become mere takers who do not care about what is left. Nature is depleted; people starve, although nature provides enough for all.

This is the biggest scandal of our times: how can richer nations look, without feeling concerned, at their neighbours who do not even have the minimum for surviving. The world is said to be a village, but is it true only for takers? Where is the basic human feeling gone? Where is civilisation gone? if we still believe that civilisation means also culture, i.e. the art of behaving and relating, and not only material wealth and power.

Consumption kills creativity, our most precious energy for inventing. We live in a constructed world which has channelled our creativity into repetitive tasks, either for production, or for leisure. Our tastes are shaped by fashion and publicity (the spirit of the market). Software and games are predefined ways of using tools. When we use

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them we just follow the instructions; we are the slaves of our machines. Our true power for invention (invention of a present and a future) has to be oriented into positive ways, for the wellbeing of all, which will open the future of young generations instead of drowning them under an avalanche of possible goods and choices which in fact resemble each other because they are made of the same spirit. Creativity is not a neutral power to do what pleases us. The use of our creativity defines where we go. Here again the Spirit is the inspiring power.

I have shown earlier how everything is given freely by nature or society: life, air, water, food, education, love. We need just to care how to share these privileged resources and keep our consumption in balance with the rhythms of nature. A market is a good place for exchanging what we do have in surplus and what other people need; and the exchange itself does not mean it should become a place for speculation or exploitation. It can be regulated and controlled by the community which is concerned at this level, whether local, regional, national or international. Market, as it functions today i.e. as a destructive force of our deeper culture and as a fundamental inversion of the laws of life, is not a calamity but something we, as a community of human beings, have created because we wanted to.

The power of the Spirit is a challenge in our lives because it reminds us that we are very different in our true nature from what we are doing of it. It is like an alarm which calls us to change, for our own safety and happiness. It calls us to simplicity; less is more. If we are ready to give up our heavy materialistic, oppressive and violent way of life, we will be much lighter, much more open to the inspiration of the Spirit. We will be better observers and listeners. And before all we will be freer to choose what is suitable because we will be under much less pressure. It is well-known that the hunters-gatherers had

much more leisure time than we have and they knew what to do with this free time: it was a time for connection, being together, linking, a time for dance with love. It is probably what our society needs the most.

Matter and Spirit

Our spiritual energies are making the world what it is; they catalyse material forces. They need to be rooted in the living Source.

The comparison between the metaphor of the Trinity and the idols of the Anti-Trinity makes it clear how much our world can be shaped by different types of energies, depending on which ones we choose to be rooted in. We can choose to become expressions of negative tendencies or be agents of positive energies. Our choices define how we influence matter because matter is governed by the spirit. Matter is a visible image of the spirit. It expresses the deeper content of our orientations: do we act in a spirit of anger, of greed, of fear, or do we aim at being signs of compassion, peace and joy. Matter is an expression of a deeper Reality which is in us. Our attitudes have their source in the deep of ourselves and in our choices how we want to behave, before they take shape into matter. Love, peace, joy are not feelings that arise naturally in us; they are conscious choices which we then attempt to make real in our life. Incarnation is about making the spirit of our choices visible.

This statement has a huge significance for the way we choose to live in the world and for the way we define which priorities will be the leading values of our behaviour. First it is essential to see how our choices are principally of spiritual order. And secondly we need to learn how to make the choice of spiritual commitment: choosing life

over matter, and being a testimony for it, in each of our actions and attitudes.

This choice for life can translate itself in different ways:

About the Father: in issues concerning power, shall I be dominant, aggressive, greedy, or shall I offer generously my skills and time in order to create equality and harmony?

About the Son: in issues concerning the choice of means of transformation and expression, shall I choose the ones which reshape the world at my image, or shall I choose the most gentle and human ones in order to leave space for everybody and give the weakest a chance for expression?

About the Spirit: in issues concerning the energy which becomes the leading force, shall I choose attitudes of greed for profit and accumulation, or shall I let myself be guided by the inspiration brought by others, by the beauty of nature, and the quality of silence?

These are three simple examples which illustrate the three persons / idols of the comparison above. It is evident that the quality of these choices, more than the actions which will result out of them, is what makes the world. These options are situated very much at the root of our being; they are the source of our behaviour. The quality of our world depends on their quality. This is the true root of the debate.

When we become aware how much our choices are of spiritual nature, the world can become a more liveable place for all because we are made free of the resigned belief that we cannot change the quality of our interaction with our surroundings and we then become free to behave in a responsible way. Very important: we do not need

to change the world to make it a good place; the true priority is for us to find how to become true to ourselves and to the world. The former is not in our power but the latter is just the topic of our everyday life. And slowly the latter leads to the former.

The fundamental choice

About Trinity / Anti-Trinity: the main thing is not the difference but their incompatibility and the fact we have to choose between them.

The comparison of the corresponding respective natures of the Trinity and the Anti-Trinity shows that they are fundamentally different. Although the three persons of each triune group have similarly to do the first with power, the second with expression and the third with energy, we can see how much they are of opposed natures and how much they lead us into opposite directions. The comparison and the essential difference it shows are fascinating as such. But this is not the core of the teaching we have to receive from this comparison. What counts the most in this demonstration is the absolute necessity for us to see how much they are opposed acting realities in our world which are not compatible and which are also of very different fundamental orders.

- They are incompatible because they foster by their respective models and actions on us two different types of natures and attitudes about life which cannot be mixed inasmuch as they cannot cohabitate without destroying each other. We must become aware that we have to choose once for ever between these two possible attitudes in order to give a true meaning to our life.
- They are also of fundamental different natures because they concern different levels of maturity and consciousness. The Anti-

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Trinity has to do with energies which covet material and short term privileges while the Trinity is a metaphor which tries to make the meaning of life understandable for disciples who want to learn about the nature of the Source that generates life in the way it does. The former is like a manual for apparent success in a short future while the latter is the wider picture of what matters in life and truth. The former is animated by the energy of the lower chakras, the latter by the energy of the upper chakras. It is evident that the second level of meaning is what makes our exclusive choice between the two models so necessary.

Out of this double statement ensues hence the necessity for us to choose between the two models as two fundamental possible ways of being how to foster our life. This is the main choice; this is the great leap forwards in the orientation of our whole existence. We need to become aware of the necessity of this choice. And this is the difficulty in the context of our society because we try to believe that both models are compatible and do not exclude each other, precisely because they operate on very different levels. But this is a treachery which makes our awareness very difficult to arise. Once the choice appears clearly – it could be called enlightenment – the opposition and the necessity to choose fundamentally between the two models and acting energies becomes so evident that one wonders how one could not see it more clearly before.

The choice is an absolute urgency in our life. In short it can be resumed to the following: is life a means to get power and wealth or is it a way to learn about the practice of love which requires attitudes of gentleness and trust and care, rather than domination and control?

First this new understanding and the clarity of this choice need to appear as fundamental to us. Secondly, equally important it is also to

make clear that the incompatibility which makes this choice necessary is not an incompatibility between life and power, or life and technology, or life and market. These three fields of our activities are neutral as long as we do not use them as means for domination and control. The essential difference consists in the energies and attitudes which lead us in everyday life. In other words our choice to follow the model of the Trinity does not mean that we will have nothing to do with power, technology and market; this would be simply impossible because they are realities of our daily life. But it means that we have to act in these three fields with the cautiousness of people who are aware how much we expose ourselves to the negative energies whose inversions that I have described are the expression. This is why the awareness of the necessity of choosing clearly and once for ever is so important; and the same awareness will also lead us in our attempt to discern how to handle power, technology and market.

Why do I describe here this qualitative choice about power, technology and market? The answer is very simple: because, if we choose life (the model of the Trinity), actions of death and destruction become much more difficult and we won't succumb to the forces of market. Where there is a will for life and for love, for care and solidarity, for adaptation and for non-violence, it is evident that mechanisms of destruction, domination and violence, such as what I have illustrated previously, are much more difficult to obey.

This is why the choice of gentleness and kindness is a fundamental one: it is the choice of the solidarity with the victim. We want to stand on the side of the weakest. This is a definitive choice. One should make this choice once for ever. Yet it is clear that we will constantly fall back into the usual patterns of our western culture because it is not easy to resist the pressure of conforming. For this

reason we will have to refresh the vow regularly, but it will just be the re-enacting of the original choice.

Breaking the paradox of free market

Paradoxically the destructive trends of free market, instead of questioning its logic, reinforce its power; the antidote is awareness.

We can summarise free market economy in four main trends towards destruction, accumulation, competition and individualism. We have shown how these trends deprive the community of possibilities of experiencing harmony in its own social network or in its relationship with nature, of creating equal possibilities of access to wealth, of practising cooperation and of building a social body based on diversity, complementarity and interdependence. The terrible signs of destruction we see everywhere around us would appear logically to become the principal forces which should fundamentally prove the aberration of the system. Paradoxically it is exactly the contrary which happens: destruction makes people more fragile and dependent on the system. In its name more freedom of trade is requested to intensify the process, for the sake of its victims, according to the trickle down principle which says that more wealth in the hands of the rich will bring more growth and therefore more wealth for the poor. Yet the practice proves how much this talk is at the same time a lie and a deep illusion.

The only possible antidote to the destructions caused by free market is a strict control of economy by the social network. The social awareness has to master and keep economic forces in check. It has to control them, to channel them and to put a limit to their freedom of action. Ethics has to become the leading force. Human values and needs have to prevail over the mechanisms of market. This is such an

evidence! One wonders why this principle has not been already implemented and why we still continue to participate in our own oppression. Awareness is the key. How long shall we remain asleep, refusing to see and to act? Or being too lazy to? The choice is ours: we have to break the illusion and resignation that the present system can bring happiness.

In the sense of a better control of social awareness about economy, I have often mentioned how the vernacular model has brought a few answers and I will come back to this topic later in order to describe the vernacular attitude in more inspiring detail. Now we will see how certain practices, already implemented by a marginal part of our society, propose solutions which can help, more as tools than as fundamental options. I will describe four categories of practices that correspond each one to one of the destructive trends of market I have just mentioned:

- 1) The art of adapting in a healthy relationship with the natural cycles and a sense of social equity becomes the antidote against destruction.
- 2) The art of sharing and caring, and the better accessibility of goods, knowledge and services, becomes the antidote against accumulation.
- 3) The art of practising solidarity becomes the antidote against competition and domination.
- 4) The art of building together a social body based on diversity, complementarity and interdependence becomes the antidote against individualism.

These positive qualities of social solidarity and awareness constitute the new frame which provides the right context of resistance to the forces of domination and destruction. The social dimension with its

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ethical preferences controls the more material aspects of human living.

We can designate this fundamentally different option by the name of “social option” because it is the social awareness, and not the economic forces, which leads the community. It means that the members of a community believe that their community can be strong enough to channel economic forces for its own common wellbeing instead of letting them go wild. Ethics can be stronger than material seduction. Remember: as citizens and consumers we are the main participants; to whom and to what shall we give our votes and preferences? what shall we support through our own daily action?

Once we have decided to be in charge, life can thrive. What is the meaning of life and how does one find the path towards truth? This is the core question which these new four conditions do not answer; yet the frame which is necessary for an authentic search and for a good life is basically ensured by these four conditions because they are rooted in another gentle spirit and understanding of life. And true life can happen. Economic activities become then tools in our hands and under our control; in these new conditions we are no more the slaves of a diffuse and oppressive power, and we can search for life.

A question of life and death

We have only a few years left to implement a radical change; if not destruction, poverty, globalisation and violence will annihilate us.

The major problem of our modern society is that we still believe, in spite of all evidences, in the model of free market as being the only possible solution or at least we adopt a position of resignation and powerlessness as if nothing could be changed. We refuse to recognise

the true nature of market in its effects. The four trends I have described show the urgent necessity for a life-saving reaction.

- 1) The destruction of nature as a consequence of the trend for exploitation: The market economy attacks the main substance of life in destroying the nourishing mother who feeds us, i.e. nature. Doing this equals cutting the branch on which we sit. Nature provides the basic resources for our own subsistence and survival. To destroy it means to deprive ourselves of what we need. Therefore the first change we need to implement consists in adapting our activities and ways of thinking to the laws and cycles of nature as it has been repeated many times in these pages. The urgency for this necessary change gives us no more than a few years to reconvert our whole economy. We have lost already more than fifty years for this reconversion since it has become obviously necessary in the sixties or seventies. Time becomes tight! If we do not act with courage and determination to succeed, our species will simply disappear... and nature will slowly recover from the damages we caused... over a few millions years to come.
- 2) Poverty as a consequence of the trend for accumulation: The gap between rich and poor increases endlessly. According to the United Nation development Report of 1992, the richest 20% of world population use more than 80% of world income and the 60% “poorest” (if we can call them poorest as they form the majority!) live on only less than 6% of world income. It means that, as rich nations, we consume 40 times more than the majority of people on this planet. At the top of the wealth ladder, 1% of the world population (about 10 times the population of small Switzerland) owns 48% of the world wealth. This deep injustice is not the result of probability and lack of resources but the product of a conscious and intentional strategy of accumulation

by a minority of privileged people (the 20% richest). Of course the major part of these privileged 20% - if it can be called a privilege to live on the expenses of others - live in western countries, although many of them form the elites of poorer countries, and despite the fact that poor people are also a reality at the core of our western nations. This rich minority is in any case very intimately linked with the benefices of our market system. Poverty is a time bomb which will kill us all, because we are all part of a same humanity. It is an illusion to believe that exploitation can last; world history shows that all empires have collapsed. Our western domination is of such a violent and primitive type that it cannot last. A radical change can only be a true progress. As says the wise man, takers might eat better but givers sleep better.

- 3) Globalisation as a consequence of the trend for competition: The materialist model of western civilisation is the poorest possible one. It destroys nature, annihilates diversity, kills traditional societies and languages (and biodiversity). Life cannot be based on destruction of what nourishes life itself. As the whole system of nature, we form as mankind an interdependent body based on the diversification of its organs and complementarity of the functions of the different parts, actors, cultures, religions. It is why exploitation and individualistic greed cannot be the basic rules for our relationships. It is urgent that we learn to live together and share what is available. And even in a more radical way: that we learn to care for each other and create harmonious and creative relationships and enjoy diversity as the source of true exchanges and complementarity. Life can only flow between different organs. Monoculture is condemned to death.
- 4) Violence as a consequence of the trend for individualism: Violence is the law which dominates our modern society based on extraction. As we have seen, violence regulates most social

relationships; weapons and armies rule the world; hunger devastates whole populations; climate change's deniers keep nations asleep; false expectations of stockholders justify exploitation; lie is the rule for publicity and politics; fiscal heavens protect criminals; rape and abuse are so frequent behind the curtain of privacy; etc. The power of violence increases ever more with time. Violent situations are "solved" with more violence which generates ever more violence. And our system, because violence is its true nature, is unable to find or propose other answers.

These four main characteristics of free market should be enough to condemn the system; yet it survives in the name of its misgivings as if these were only minor failures to be corrected. Because these main trends will condemn the surviving of humanity at short term they call for an urgent change in the next few years before it is too late. This is evidently the main urgency of our time. Change is a question of life and death.

Despite this evident urgency, there is nevertheless enough reasons for a change in mere terms of humanistic and spiritual reasons. A deeper understanding of life, as being more than just material surviving and greed, calls us to change our ways of life because more gentleness and compassion would transform our life into a more creative and happier experience for all of us. This seems to be an idealistic aim; yet even a truly pragmatic approach should not ignore the immaterial aspects of reality. It would be like ignoring the wind factor while you are sailing under the pretext that it is not visible!

The purpose of the present description of the four main destructive trends of free market at this stage of our reflexion is not to introduce new considerations but to remind ourselves of the urgency and of

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what demonstrates that there is in fact a total absence of choice: beyond qualitative considerations change is not a choice but a question of survival. Nothing more needs to be added.

The 5 choices – fear or trust

We need to make a collective choice for trust, instead of for fear, to allow us to practise adaptation, expression, sharing, care, peace.

It is clear that our market system brings more suffering than satisfaction; it is based on the illusion that everybody can be a winner without losers, and that the world is an infinite storage of resources which are never extinguishable. These two premises are evidently false; the practice is proving that it does not work.

We have therefore to change our mind, see the reality as it is, and accept to adapt to this new reality. We have to make clear choices which are at the same time personal and collective choices and which constitute the necessary minimal condition for finding a form of common happiness. Five choices, at this stage, seem to constitute the core of the necessary evolution of our species into a higher state of awareness and maturity. They are all choices which call us to commit for an attitude based on trust in opposition to an attitude based on fear.

- 1) Choosing adaptation over domination: the resources of our world are limited. We have to review our needs and do with much less. This is the choice for simplicity which brings more happiness. We have to adapt to natural cycles and give up our idea that we can dominate the world and take and take.
- 2) Choosing expression over workforce: the conditions of work have been defined by the laws of market. As I showed earlier, they are

based on greed and profit, exploitation and destruction. Work includes in fact all the aspects of our life; it is meant to ensure our subsistence, but it is also the vector for our social integration, for creating new social links, for being respected and recognised. It is an act of creation and love. The choice for creation is a condition to provide work conditions which allow each of us to thrive and to become members of a living community lead by human values and not by materialism and greed.

- 3) Choosing the joy of sharing over the false security of ownership: if we accept to share goods, we all get better access to much more possibilities of use, and this becomes true for more people. We have to privilege access to use over ownership.
- 4) Choosing the will to care for all members of the community over the law of competition and domination: the system of competition makes more losers than winners and increases the gap between a minority of privileged people and a majority of people who become ever poorer, not only from the material point of view but also in what concerns their quality of health, dwelling, education, work conditions, recognition, emotional life. Impoverishment is in fact general for all, on all levels (except material for a minority of 20% of world population). We have to learn how to care for all, because the quality of life (at all levels of the social scale) depends on the degree of equality in the community.
- 5) Choosing peace over violence: as it has been said before, the logic of our whole society is based on violence. Violence is not something which happens as a side effect; it is the logic of our system: competition, domination, exploitation, stimulation of greed, fear of differences, avidity for success and prestige, devaluation of human worth. The present logic of our relationships is based straightaway on fear, which generates violent attitudes, instead of counting on trust, which opens progressively doors to cooperation. We have to learn new ways to

relate to one another which allow trust to grow between people instead of being immediately discarded.

As these five choices are very important, we will examine them one by one in more detail.

1) Adaptation or domination

In a world with limited resources and finite growth we have to adapt to the laws of nature; simplicity is wealth; small is beautiful!

Growth is an illusion. When politicians talk of the necessity to have an annual economic growth of 3%, it means that our consumption doubles in 25 years. We need already to use the resources of 1.3 planet for covering our “needs”, as we are already using more than the planet produces (it is why it is on the way to exhaustion). An annual growth of 3% means then that we will need 2.6 planets in 2040, 5.2 in 2065, 8 planets in 2090! This is evidently absurd on a limited planet, especially with a growing population and poor countries catching up with richer countries (i.e. they imitating our way of life and we persisting in it). Growth is a lie, which means that we have to review our needs, live with much less and share what is given, especially because it is given for all and not for a privileged few.

This movement of self-limitation is not a dreadful effort. It is on the opposite a precious opportunity to review our priorities and to focus on the essential. In fact we do not need much to satisfy our basic material needs like food, water, housing, work. And immaterial basic resources can be provided with very little means: health, education, respect, trust, love. Paradoxically self-limitation generates an increase in quality.

I will not develop this topic here, yet it is important to emphasise the fact that basic needs are very easy to satisfy for all. This is the big scandal of the present poverty in our world. There are enough resources to satisfy the needs of all. If it is not done, it is only because there is no common will to do so. This does not mean that nobody wants to: it means that the dominant collective will does not consider these issues as priorities. How can this be compatible with the idea that we are civilised people?

The most challenging truth for the reality of market economy is the fact that most goods are provided free of charge by nature or the community. The second truth is that it is through our work (which does not deplete any natural resources) that we have to care for our own subsistence and the one of our relatives and dependents.

Adaptation means that we transform our ways of life in order to respect these two categories of challenges: 1) the limitation of the resources of our planet and the need to share them between all, 2) the necessity to allow each one to have access to their subsistence and to a decent quality of life.

2) Expression or workforce

Work includes all aspects of human life as an act of creation, a means to be recognised; human values have to preserve this quality.

We have seen how the market has reduced the value of human work to a simple good called workforce to be sold and bought on the market, similar to any other good. But work is indeed the tool of our personal expression because it is not only reduced to providing the conditions for our physical survival, but it includes all aspects of life:

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the simple means for feeding our family, the way we care for the ones we love, the way we express special social, artistic, intellectual or spiritual skills. This understanding of work is far from the one on which “production” is based.

We can say: everything is work. Brushing our teeth, planting the garden, composing a love song, repairing the roof of the house, praying, reading, feeding the chooks, etc. These are all acts of life and they are work. There is in fact no limit between subsistence, work and leisure because all kinds of acts of life are necessary for a full life. There is intrinsically no distinction between paid work and shadow work, between work and other activities.

I have shown how work is necessary for our subsistence and for our family or community. According to Chayanov’s law and its corollary, effort can stop when subsistence is ensured. But subsistence is more than merely physical and material; it includes all the qualities of human relationships and social links. Work in this sense is creativity. What we need the most is not money but to be seen and recognised for what we are. Work makes us visible and loveable while it is at the same time the way to express love and to show others we have seen them and recognised them for what they are. Work is nothing else than the activity of life. It is the pretext for linking one with another. The process is more important than the result, even if the result is not to be neglected or despised.

It is why it is essential that we learn to protect work as one of our most precious tools for expression and creativity. This perception of the intrinsic value of work is far from the usual understanding of work as a punishment or as a sad necessity for survival that destroys us. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the most basic material subsistence remains an evident principal constraint of our activities

because we need to eat and drink and be sheltered, these constraints are not the only ones which define work, and it is the role of any mature community to protect work as a means for expression.

It is the test of our wisdom to be able to protect this quality in a similar way as we have more or less learned to protect affective safety of children, care for illness, struggle for justice, etc. Our community shows every day how it can care for more than just mechanical processes; care, love, generosity, peace and joy are qualities we know because they are protected in our families or in our neighbourhood and we care for them because we know they define the quality of our life.

3) Sharing or ownership

We have to change from the logic of ownership to one based on open sharing: free access to use offers more satisfaction for many.

The logic of our economic system is based on the acquisition of goods more than on the satisfaction of needs. This implies that accumulation is the rule, more than access to the use of what is needed. Of course the question of the nature of our needs remains unchanged in both cases, yet the range of satisfaction is so much broader when things are understood to be used rather than to be owned. The logic of use allows a much wider access to a diversified range of possibilities for a wider range of people than the logic of ownership. In the latter case it is necessary to own something to be able to use it, and when the good is not used it stays on a shelf or in a storage room and remains inaccessible for other users. In the former case access does not mean ownership; access can be much broader and made possible for all. One can see that ownership is a form of general deprivation.

This topic has been already abundantly developed in the precedent pages and I won't repeat here what has already been expressed. Yet something must be emphasised. This statement is not against private property as such; it is only against its forms of abuse. It is evident that I have a right to own my tooth brush or my trousers. Many items are very personal and must keep this personal significance. They cannot be shared. On the other hand goods and tools need someone to be responsible for their maintenance, and this person in charge can be precisely the owner. Ownership does not mean inevitably that the use is not shared. Only our extreme understanding of ownership has made it a restraining form which prevents a more general use.

It is where we have to evolve: we have to understand how goods are an opportunity for creating links between us, instead of exclusion. The book I love or the music I like to listen to are precisely what should be shared first. Because I love it, I should give it away: it can be lent, or really given. The important is that it can be shared. Sharing brings the true joy of relationship. Too often we are afraid of this unknown intensity and we take refuge in ownership, in accumulation of a lot of stuff which is never or rarely used.

We have also to rediscover the deep meaning of the commons, these goods which nobody can own because they remain common property: air, water, sun, energy from nature, life, environment, knowledge, solidarity, justice, etc. In some societies even the forests, the rivers, the lakes, the mountain pastures, and many other goods are parts of the commons. We can decide to reduce these commons and try to exploit them individually. This is what most big corporations intend to do; they try for instance to patent the growth of plants which is in fact a natural process and therefore a common good. Or on the contrary we can try to extend the content of the commons and

their use. In keeping as much wealth as possible in common free access, we challenge our way of thinking in terms of ownership: this is mine, this is yours. In accepting that most goods are common by nature and do not belong to anybody, it transforms the meaning of these goods because they become a gift each time we use them. In keeping these goods in common access, we allow everybody to access them when they need them. This openness breaks the social hierarchy according to wealth. It is in a sense what public services are meant to do: health, sanitation, education are made available for all at no cost.

Yet nowadays there is the tendency to privatise these services and to make them opportunities for profit. This is a way to reduce the commons to almost nothing, whereas in extending the field of the commons we create an inestimable treasure of common wealth. Indeed there are very few things which cannot be part of the commons as a common wealth. This is our choice: do we want to open the access to diversified goods, creating in this way equality and justice, or do we want to use ownership as a means for establishing a social hierarchy based on differences of status and wealth? The wider the range of the commons is, the richer we all become. Equality and sharing are means for true wealth for all. This choice for more equity is in our personal power: we can practise it (live it) every day and transform in this way our local community.

4) Care or competition

Competition means many losers and a few winners; in caring for all and striving for equality we allow everybody to become richer.

This is the corollary of the precedent statement: equality makes us all richer, whether we are at the top or the bottom of the social ladder.

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Unequal societies are more discordant and unstable because they spend most of their energy fighting against the reactions created by injustice and all members suffer under this state of tension. They have more health problem, a more inefficient education system, a wider practice of violence, deeper injustice, etc. It is the reason why it is worth for a community to learn how to care for all the members of the community, so that everybody gets what is basically needed: food, water, shelter, sanitation, health, education, good work conditions, social recognition, and even love and spiritual teaching. Care is the hard learning path for compassion and for the respect of people as they are.

Competition, as we have seen, generates tensions and a violent system corroded by conflict. Competition arises naturally from our tendency to compete for goods because we believe they are rare. But this scarcity exists only in our imagination, especially because the market has made money the only way to access what we need for the satisfaction of our needs. Scarcity arises from this obligatory narrow passage through the acquisition of money to get the goods we need. If we can access resources more directly, independently of money - because they are abundantly accessible in nature or a public service provides them widely for all free of charge - we see that they are in sufficient quantity to satisfy our basic needs, yet not our greed.

Fashion, publicity, the false idea it generates of what success is, and especially our mimetic tendency to desire the same as our neighbour, generate an artificial scarcity because our desires are no more born out of our true needs but artificial manmade tendencies created by a commercial system based on profit or mimesis. This is not real scarcity; this is just the blow up of illusion.

Basic needs are very few and they necessitate only simple means to be satisfied. If a poor community cannot afford to provide drinking water to each house, it should be at least able to deliver it to a few collective taps accessible to all people of the neighbourhood. Basic health for all requires only average training for the caring staff and only few tools and medication. Everybody knows about the “bare foot doctors” or the Cuban doctors or similar forms of practising a wide range medicine. If our western health systems have been turned into very expensive machines, it is because they provide very sophisticated treatments which go much beyond the basic necessary cares, and this at a high cost. It does not mean that these treatments should not be delivered; it means only that this high level of treatment has nothing to do with the basic needs which should be covered in priority for all. On the other hand, illnesses today are due to our modern conditions of life that degenerate under the pressure of competition. The first improvement of basic care in our modern society would consist in abolishing competition as the main rule of our social system, and health would improve in a significant way.

Today there is so much wealth in the world (in terms of finance as well as in terms of knowledge) but this wealth is concentrated in privileged hands or regions instead of being available for the majority. This is the main problem. The question is how to use this wealth and how to distribute it better. This depends on our awareness and our choice to serve all or to be slaves to a few. This is basically an ethical choice but the answer concerns most of us and the quality of life for the majority, including marginalised people, poorer countries, neglected categories of people like handicapped or older people. It is why in a democratic system it should not be difficult to implement care for all. It is mainly a question of awareness and of will, it means of priorities, more than of what is possible or not. This

is principally how we answer the question: what for us and what for them? As if there were an “us” and a “them”.

The fascinating thing about care is that it is grounded on respect of the person, whoever this person is. Respect is not linked with any economic value of the person as it is the case on the market when we are considered as workforce or consumers. Respect is based on our true identity of being. This identity does not need to be formalised by a title or a social position; it is just being. The person can be mighty, wealthy, healthy, beautiful, clever, friendly or have any other quality which would make him or her attractive to others. Or he or she can be handicapped, senile, ignorant, poor, ugly, etc. This does not change anything about his or her identity. Of course these qualitative aspects are intentionally chosen here to present a caricatured image and show how exterior aspects are not defining the true identity of anybody. Care in this way is a fantastic opportunity to learn what identity truly is. When a very sick or handicapped person has to be cared for, we have to practise compassion at a deeper level because the choice to care for the person confronts us with a very deep suffering which is not easy to face. When we live with the partner we have chosen and everything is running well, it is easy to love. But when this partner falls ill and the body starts to decay in a way or another, the communication becomes more difficult; the person becomes like hidden, overlaid by a cover of exterior “ugliness” linked with the illness. It is then harder to recognise the person we loved behind this mask of suffering. Yet the person remains unchanged in her or his depth, behind the curtain. Caring becomes in this case a very challenging exercise because it requires from us that we continue seeing the person we know or the person we perceive, despite the overlaying cover of suffering and deformation. When the partner has a grave accident, or reaches a final stage in a life threatening illness, or becomes senile, it is hard to keep the true connection. Care is the

school for this deep respect which goes beyond appearances and accepts people as they are, whatever they are. This is the practice of true compassion which is the most challenging path.

One can see how this other perception of care is completely opposed to the one the market develops and encourages us to adopt. It is why care is so important because it transforms our society into a real community where everybody can have their place and be respected. Care is the practical key for more humanity, how to tame ugliness and make it beautiful.

5) Peace or violence

It is never said how much our society is based on the practice of violence: war, exploitation (man, nature), competition, “us - them”.

As I have repeated many times, the practice of violence is not a side effect of our modern society but a core function which ensues out of the pattern of growth, of inextinguishable desire, of want for prestige and domination, for the accumulation of the most unrealistic wealth, for differentiation from others through artificial status. Competition impregnates our values and we are no more aware how much it generates violence.

Acts of violence are treated as isolated facts by our judicial system and almost never related to a generally violent context we have chosen to exacerbate by accepting to generalise the tendencies of our free market system. As I have described, the market creates the most extreme tensions and inequalities which generate in turn violence and need for vengeance.

We can illustrate this tendency with a few examples:

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Our relationships with nature are based on exploitation which leads to its destruction. Nature is not considered as a living system but as a mere heap of stuff to be taken. This is an essential practice of violence which won't be long to kill us: climate change, natural disasters, exhaustion of life resources like drinking water, perturbation of main natural equilibriums, etc.

Most of our daily work's conditions are based on exploitation since workforces are sold on the work market. No economic force is in play which cares for the human quality of work, as means for creativity and expression, as condition for the development of skills and social recognition. The general injustice of work conditions, of patent exploitation, and even of destruction of so many lives creates evidently a climate for violence.

The market is a violent means to extract a surplus from what is common wealth. It is based on the power of control which allows a minority to dominate and impose their will. It creates a social hierarchy based on accumulation which generates jealousy, envy to climb at any price. Publicity exacerbates this trend in making unreachable goods desirable. Fashion transforms ownership in prestige. This all system is evidently the source of an immense violence.

Desire in general is a source of conflict, especially when it makes desirable what is not abundant (the scarcity I have described). Desire generates mimesis. Mimesis exacerbates desire and creates conflict. The fragility of our identity and our own doubts about ourselves are factors that participate to make the competition in acquisition still more acute. Violence is the latent force of this process.

In our social life we feel the need to know where we stand on the social ladder. We need to know that we are above him but yet still below her. We need a ready-made hierarchy; we need a system of domination. And mainly we need a victim. In this social system based on hierarchy we live in constant fear of losing our bearings. It makes our tendency to become a victimiser still more important. Without this possibility to dominate or to have someone below us who threatens our position, we are not at peace. Yet this violence is precisely what threatens us.

The victim is an essential role of stability of our society. The Nazi era has demonstrated this mechanism in an extreme way. Any society finds its own cohesion by opposition to a fictive enemy. The Jews have often plaid this role in the past, and sadly still today, or Gipsies, or strangers, or refugees, or an ethnic minority. There is always a group, or even an individual who presents himself to play this role, because they are different. Victimisation is an incredibly frequent mechanism in the stabilisation process of any social group. The search for hidden signs of victimisation or marginalisation is certainly a very fascinating tool to discover how much violence impregnates our relationships.

Our judicial system always treats crimes and acts of violence as individual and isolated cases, with little relation with the context. It never relates it to a general climate of violence which impregnates our society. In the best case it describes the motivation for committing crimes partly as a consequence of a difficult social context in which the perpetrator has grown up. As crime is perceived as an individual act, punishment is also therefore administrated as an individual destiny.

On an international level the same can be said about acts of terrorism: they are never perceived as the consequences of the aggressiveness of our western militaro-merchant society, never understood as reactions of self-defence. When the US invade Afghanistan or Iraq, they pretend to do so in response to (or sometimes even in prevention of) the danger of terrorism. On their part “insurgents” are never considered to defend their rights or own survival. The simple term of “insurgent” used in these cases means that they act against the law, i.e. the law of the invaders. Smaller groups of fighters are mainly considered as illegal and outside the frame defined by international law. On the opposite any national army (US, France, UK, Israel, etc) is considered in its right when it intervenes on another territory. We pretend in this way to be always the victims who defend ourselves instead of being the active initiators of violent conflicts as victimisers.

Our identity as a group is in most cases defined as a form of opposition to another group. This is the fiction of the “we” against the “them”. Differences become the source of opposition and conflicts. The “other” becomes the enemy. Maybe there is a reason for the conflict at the origin, but soon the conflict develops and gains in intensity, for the simple reason that the other is the enemy. The vicious circle of violence has no end. They killed my son; I will kill their sons too. This is a never ending spiral of violence which generates ever more violence.

The logic of war is based on this image of the enemy. Once the spiral of increasing violence has become the leading force, it is almost impossible to escape it. We seem to be like slaves to it, to a need for revenge, to an obsession for punishment. Violence seems always to be the product of the other. We understand ourselves only as defenders of our rights, as responding to violence by the necessary

means for our self-protection. But evidently this interpretation is wrong. Violence generates more violence and we can only be responsible for the violence on our side. We can only influence the violence practised by the other side in not nourishing it, which is extremely difficult, especially when one is full of vengeance. The main difficulty in this case is to find the way out of this vicious cycle.

Only non-violence can be the tool. The only possibility is to renounce violence and to try to create a beginning of trust, despite the hate which impregnates the conflict on both sides. Generally we do not want to talk to our enemies, for the simple reason that they are our enemies. But it is precisely the reason why we have to talk with them. Negotiation and reconciliation follow a hard way because they require that we make concessions, that we abandon rigidity and that we give up everything we can give up in order to reach a form of agreement. It is our responsibility to find a new way to contact these enemies and to join them where they stand if we want to escape the cycle of violence. This is a step which requires a lot of courage because it tries to create a climate of trust where everything is arguing against it, when nothing shows that trust is possible. The first step is the hardest. This is certainly a long progressive process. The important thing is that it has to be started by one of the protagonists, by the wisest or the most courageous, or the one who is in the better position to do so.

Many people along the long process of history have shown us this path of reconciliation. People like Gandhi or Martin Luther King have traced a new path of courage, certainly at a very high price they had to pay with their life. They have been firm in their belief of non-violence to the extreme of choosing to stand on the side of the victim. The process of victimisation is then reversed and peace can start to find an expression.

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The non-violent way is the only way out. It takes usually a lot of time until the protagonists of conflict understand that there is no other exit than non-violence and reconciliation. For the initiator of this new path there is a mighty risk that other participants do not understand him. Many of the inspiring figures of peace-making have been killed by fanatics who did not understand what they were doing. Yet this remains the only possible path.

Reinventing the institutions of our society in a spirit of non-violence is a huge task: a relationship with nature which accepts to adapt to the cycles of natural rhythms and to be inspired by the subtleness of their evolution, an understanding of work as a contribution to the welfare of humanity, a system of exchanges which cares for the satisfaction of the needs of all, an expression of desires which does not create conflicts nor endless imitation but individuation in the respect of others, a form of social togetherness which does not rely on hierarchy but on complementarity, a form of care for all which does not feed on the victim but remains solidary with the weakest, a relationship with the strangers which does not make them enemies but integrates them as other human beings who are indeed more similar to us than they are different, a perception of difference that is felt as a wealth and not as a threat, a faculty of solving conflicts by non-violent means, of avoiding wars through an ability to create conditions of trust and reconciliation. This is certainly an infinite task, but in any case much more fascinating and creative when it is lead on the path of non-violence than when it is abandoned to our instinct of fear.

A world in transition

A non-violent attitude as an answer to conflicts does not aim at changing our world but at finding our own way to be in harmony.

Every generation dreams of changing our turbulent world into a peaceful place of joy and harmony for all. Luckily we are powerless to do so, because it would be another way of dominating and imposing our ways. Nevertheless this limitation of our power for change does not mean that we are condemned to be passive. A transition towards a more peaceful society is possible. Yet it is not the revolution of one day; it is a slow process which begins in the way we practise non-violence, peace and harmony in our own everyday life. We have shown how the market fosters violence or how our tendency to victimisation creates injustice and oppression. This is precisely in these many fields of violence that our attitude can make a difference by the way how we relate to work, wealth, ownership, sharing, difference, weakness, poverty, need, desire, conflict, etc. Each of the situations of everyday life is an opportunity to make a difference: more for the sake of how we interact with the world than for the sake of changing it into pure harmony.

Our practice is the way, the path to wisdom and the path to realisation. It is at the same time an experience, an experiment, a search for meaning, an attempt for implementation, a tool for discernment, a learning curve in detachment.

Then when it is well practised, it can change the world; but this change is then simply the natural fruit of our effort of transforming ourselves. It is not another task we have to achieve separately. It flows naturally from what we are. The general quality of our life flows from being more than from doing.

Messiness and perfection

Despite its harmony, life is messy because it is the result of many conflicting forces; our true path is perfection in the right attitude.

At the first glance nature is a form of disorder or messiness. Yet it has in its depth a strong harmony, not in detail, but in its whole, in its orientation towards a final aim, in its meaning. General forces are aiming at a general balance, at harmony, at beauty. Nature is in this way just an aspect of life. And life also seems messy despite its deeper harmony. Forces are all the time interfering with its smooth flow and make it hectic, even if we have found a better balance in our inner being. Accidents, natural impacts, illness, death are continuously interfering with our projects. Similarly, as an expression of nature and of our human influence, the world we have shaped is equally messy: it is mainly the expression of our inner messiness, of our own imbalances, contradictions and disarray.

Yet behind this appearance of messiness of nature, of life and of the world, there is a deeper order that escapes very often our attention. Confronted with this form of apparent (and superficial real) messiness we have to choose to adopt the right attitude of inner peace and interior balance. We are not in charge of the world but of the way we react to it and interact with it. It means that it is important that we keep our own inner harmony while facing the messiness of our surroundings. Our main vocation is not to control and dominate the world; it is to live in harmony with it, with our neighbours and all living beings, whether humans, animals, plants or rocks. This is not an attitude of weakness and total adaptation; it is on the contrary a courageous attitude of resistance, pondered with the acceptance of what is, because it opposes non-violence to a violent context, peace to war, compassion to destruction, care to domination.

Our society is obsessed by control and domination, but indeed our vocation is in detachment and letting go. It does not mean indifference, but on the opposite it means great concern because we do not let our projections, desires and expectations interfere with what we see. In order to bring peace we need to be interiorly peaceful; in order to bring justice, we need to be interiorly in equanimity. Non-violence is not a principle but a practice. Our own even practice and attitude of peace is the way to heal the world because it brings into our surroundings the quality which is most needed. We can only try to be perfect in our attitude, in our own being, because it is the only tool for expression we have. Our attempt for perfection is our best tool to resist violence and domination, by being a creature of life to resist what brings death and destruction. Perfection is an inner quality which impregnates life in its core. Messiness gets in this way tamed and quietened, despite it is not under control. The appearance of disorder remains but the true content of harmony is enhanced and charged by our positive spirit. “Harmony in the whole, tumult in detail” as used to say the Swiss French architect Le Corbusier.

The actor and the spectator

While we act in our own life, we can also simultaneously be the observer or distant spectator of who we are and how we are acting.

In our own life we can be at the same time the actor and the spectator. It means we are acting normally in our life as we do usually in our everyday life, and we have also the possibility to observe simultaneously how we are acting and feeling, as if we were an exterior observer of ourselves, as if we were a spectator. We are at the same time the actor on the stage and the spectator in the armchair watching the actor on the stage. This kind of double stand allows us

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to run our normal life and to be also acutely aware of how we are behaving and what is happening in ourselves in terms of feelings and impressions. We are at the same time the subjective actor and the objective observer. Our awareness of the way we behave becomes like detached from our feelings because we are not involved in the way we observe ourselves: we are just the neutral observer.

This is a vast topic which could be the material for a whole book in itself. It is why we won't develop it further at this stage. In what concerns the values which lead us in our relationships with the material world and the way we interact with goods and services and with the whole of economic activities and exchanges, it is essential to notice this possibility of being the aware observer of how we act. This is the key for keeping the perfect attitude of inner peace we have just described. Of course this ability to be simultaneously the committed actor and the neutral spectator requires some training; it is a faculty we have to learn, develop and choose to apply. When we have developed it we become able to observe more acutely how we behave and to become more conscious of it and of which attitude we want to adopt.

True identity

Our true essence is not found in accumulation but in experiencing the flow of what is gratuitously given, in discovering it more deeply.

I have mentioned previously how much our attraction for material goods, for competition and for accumulation is due to our insecurity in our own being. We never stop needing to create and grasp a material image of what we are. We seem to constantly need a visible status to know our place in our social context. We need truly before all to be seen and recognised for what we are. But this essence is

much more than a material and social status; it is a true way of being which is given to us at birth with all our gifts and skills. We don't need more. It seems that our role and vocation are not to create a social persona with all its appendixes (power, prestige, wealth) but to experience life at the full. It is why control, competition, accumulation are only false answers to our true needs. They are based on the illusion of a social image and persona, but not on our true essence and vocation. We are indeed called to experience the beautiful gratuity of all the natural and social resources I have described in our considerations about the nature of resources and work. I have affirmed that everything is given by nature gratuitously (life, air, water, food) or by our social surroundings (care, education, love), except for the cost of work that we have chosen to convert into a monetary income. In fact everything is free; nevertheless we have obligations to return it in the way we choose: this is the cyclic aspect of life, its sustainable dimension. This is the true dynamic of reciprocity that we choose to manage in the way we want. Yet, as I have described in my comments about the nature of market forces, our modern society proposes another model, which is completely opposed to the model of gratuity.

Once we have understood that life is based on gratuity we can really wonder and experience graciousness and gratitude. We can even be more precise in this description of the marvel of gratuity: life is not only a wonder because everything is given to us gratuitously when we do not prevent this to happen, but life is a wonder because the never ending discovery of this form of essential gratuity constitutes the deepest joy of life. It means that the source of joy is not so much the gratuity itself, but the discovery of the nature of this gratuity. What is the most precious in discovery is the fact that it is ever new, ever a wonder which never stops discovering new aspects of gratuity and life. Each instant is a wonder, a move towards gratitude. This

existential model is far from what we are taught to practise by the logic of market and of our social culture. Yet it is nearer to our heart than we think. When we are truly alive, isn't it what we do? When we fall in love, when we live in the present instant, when we stop worrying about accumulation, life can arise as ever new: a constant discovery.

In perpetual discovery and constant wonderment, there is nothing to grasp. Life is a flow, like a river. We have to swim in it, without holding it. It is precisely the reason why accumulation is sterile. It is like holding what should flow; it is like retaining what should circulate; it is like getting stuck in immobility while everything is just a constant changing flow. If we want to be up-to-date, we have to swim in the current and not remain immobile on the edge. If we close our arms around our possessions, we are not free to open them to life, and life passes by unnoticed.

We came to life naked and naked we will return to dust. There is nothing to be accumulated, nothing to be taken with. We have just to be. Discovery is our identity: we are a big ear, a big skin, a big eye which can experience and register, be affected and interpret. Our experience is the only thing we can integrate and collect; yet it is not stuff, it is just quality and maturity, joy and awareness, detached from material substance, even if it comes to us through, and thanks to, a material consistency.

As the never ending discovery of gratuity is a mystery, it would be difficult to develop a more precise explanation of what I try to describe here. We just need to believe in it and to test and experience this belief in our everyday life. We need certainly courage to do so because it goes against the stream of the conventional teaching according to classic economics and the general pragmatism of our

modern society. Yet it seems completely in harmony with the deeper teaching of old human wisdom about life in the instant, detachment, serenity and inner peace. What to believe? This is your choice! The perfection of the right attitude has to become the answer to the superficial and apparent messiness of the world; this is the expression of its true harmony.

Recomposing the elements of a new anthropology

We need to recombine (attune) the positive gains of our modern civilisation with the spiritual orientation of our new anthropology.

The incompatibility of the two opposed modes I have described and the urgency for a fundamental choice I have affirmed between a life giving anthropology (the symbolic model of the Trinity) and the illusion of the Power-Technology-Market idol (the model of the Anti-Trinity) implies that we have to reconstruct completely our economic system on the base of a new understanding of our human relationships. It does not mean that we go back to the old primitive system, but we need to reinterpret each positive gain of our past evolution, with all its riches in knowledge and scientific discovery, in the light of our true human values (new anthropology). It will allow us to combine the gains of the three quantum leaps I have described earlier (agriculture, Renaissance, industrial revolution) with the values that have been sacrificed to at that time because people thought these spiritual values stood in the way of a richer growth, although they were in truth the cornerstone of this richer possible evolution.

The fundament for this different approach for a reconstruction of deeply human relationships is on one hand the radical choice for a priority of human values over material opportunities and on the other

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hand the never ending awe in our permanent discovery of the gratuity of what we receive in everyday life, because it is the experience of the permanent wonder at the true nature of life.

It is what I intend to do now: we will examine how we can very practically recombine the different qualities gained out of the main stages of evolution of our civilisation with the deep qualities I have described about the true nature of the bricks of economy as parts of our human relationships and personal or collective expression.

The qualities to be reintegrated that I will mention are only a few among many more. They will be just a few examples and illustrations of the process of re-composition we have to go through. There is evidently no ready-made recipe but it is simply a constant lively process which never ceases because it is in the flow of life itself that we have to reinterpret the meaning of everyday perception.

Recomposing the life giving parameters

This re-composition cannot be described in a few lines; it would probably need many books. Yet I would like to show here how it could be done. In a simplified version and as one of the possible approaches, it could look like the form of argumentation I will develop here below. So far I have illustrated previously the choice for a new anthropology, i.e. the choice for life (the metaphor of the Trinity) opposed to idols (the model of the Anti-Trinity), by five choices presented as polarities opposing trust and fear: 1) adaptation or domination, 2) expression or workforce, 3) sharing or ownership, 4) care or competition, 5) peace or violence. Of course reality is more complex than it appears in this first description. If we want to recompose our heritage to harmonise it with a new anthropology, we

need to reorganise many parameters in a way that includes the law of complexity. As a first illustration of possible re-composition, we will now examine the respective natures of two main types of societies which have developed in western historical time and see how their components can be recombined in a different way, despite the fact that they seem to be antagonistic or incompatible. These two main types of societies are on one hand the country based traditional society which gets its subsistence principally from agriculture and on the other hand the city based society which gets its subsistence mainly from trade.

Backcountry and seashore

Two types of societies have developed in the past: the inner country living from agriculture, and the seashore cities living from trade.

There is a word in Latin and in French which is difficult to translate in English because it does not have any correspondent: the word “littoral” (litus in Latin) which means the seashore or the coastline as an edge, as a limit between two worlds, between the solid ground of cultivated habitable soil and the element of water of the ocean. The water of the ocean can be considered as an obstacle, but it can also be perceived as an opportunity to connect with “the other” who lives on the other side. Whether its land is blocked inside the main land or, on the contrary, free to connect with the other side of the sea, it makes a huge difference in the way a society can evolve and what will be its main characteristics and values

- 1) Traditional societies have developed mainly in the inner country because they were living from cattle-rearing and agriculture which was providing everything their consumed. Unless they were near a river, trade was for them difficult because transport

on earth was effortful. These traditional societies had usually a king or a chief and the structure of the society was of feudal or autocratic type, usually with a central government. They developed more social and political skills, caring for welfare more than for accumulation of wealth. On the other hand these societies were the principal providers of food. The market in the local town was the place for exchanges for the goods which were not available through agriculture or needed specialisation (handicraft and trades).

- 2) By contrast the Phoenician and Greek civilisations were seashore people who were living from the sea. Instead of seeing the sea as an obstacle, they saw it as an opportunity for contacts and exchanges. Rapidly their cities became important harbours with incoming and outgoing ships loaded with goods for trade; they practised trade with neighbouring islands and countries. On the continent rivers were playing the same role because they were allowing transport on water. In this way these trading societies developed skills for negotiation which enable them to practise democracy. They improved rather scientific and technological skills (boats, weapons, astronomy) and became later the main colonial powers.

We have here two different models of societies¹⁵. To the first model belongs France with its great concern for government policies, or Russia; to the second belongs England with its skills for implementing practical solutions as well as the Hansa Cities, Venice, Genoa, and many cities along rivers. Our modern western society has followed the second pattern. We tend more and more to leave behind the production of food and to rather concentrate on services. The

search for profit calls us even to abandon industrial production if we can buy our goods from China for instance.

Schematically these two models present two very opposed qualities of development:

- 1) First we have a traditional and usually conservative society anchored in the land, with agriculture as its principal resource, as food is necessary for surviving and the pattern of subsistence is the image of a good life. Life is community based, in small groups that work in an independent way until basic needs and desires are satisfied, according to Chayanov's law. Trade is reduced, mobility too. Life develops in a more local circle, including the next town. Interdependence generates a form of solidarity between people. The relationships are impregnated with the notion of common good and of care for each other, as two basic necessities.
- 2) Secondly we have a more specialised society which does not produce what it needs but what it can sell. The needs are answered by trade. It means that other external social groups produce what is needed. Negotiation gives birth to democracy. Yet this does not mean equality because the spirit of competition inherent to trade is creating a strong social hierarchy. Trade is used as a means to dominate. Differences of class and of wealth arise quickly as a product of the system. Mobility is strong and opportunities for opening to other cultures and ways of life are numerous and rich, that offer many experiences for tolerance. Contacts are established over the oceans. This provides rich opportunities for exchanges, social and material, but it generates also processes of domination and exploitation.

¹⁵ See the excellent book by Edward W. FOX: *History in Geographic Perspective: the Other France*. 1971, W. W. Norton & Company.

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Of course none of these two societies exists as such; these are only simplified models. Nevertheless this description allows us to see some potentials and some handicaps in both models. The question arises naturally whether it is possible to combine the potentials of both models without having the handicaps. This is what I will try to investigate now.

Choices in polarities

Recombining the compatible qualities to be selected out of opposed models: food/things, subsistence/trade, autocracy/democracy, etc.

The comparison of these two types of societies we just examined shows how a choice for one of these two opposed models fosters in itself all kinds of qualities and skills which are difficult to dissociate from one another and from the model that gave them shape. For instance we observe how, on the long term, life on the seashore has helped develop a form of trade that turns the back to agriculture and generates at the same time trends for democracy combined with trends for domination. These characteristics seem to exclude the qualities peculiar to the other model (backcountry and agriculture) such as subsistence, solidarity and care. Out of this observation the question arises whether it is possible to combine these respective qualities of different models, like out of a catalogue, such as trade and democracy from the latter model, combined with solidarity and care from the former model, instead of with domination. The fundamental question consists in discovering what has to be done in order to make it possible to combine these qualities out of different opposed systems and make them compatible. A special social awareness is needed to keep control of the inherent self-defending forces of the system which would inevitably try to prevent these qualities from arising or remaining alive because they are perceived

as a threat to the main privileges that the model has helped to acquire..

In the description above concerning the two models of society, we can notice how corresponding respective characteristics of the two models go by pairs, by polarities, and seem to oppose each other. Subsistence seems opposed to trade, food and basic needs to more sophisticated goods and culture, democracy to autocracy, solidarity to domination, diversity to stability, care to profit, etc. It is worth examining these polarities in more detail. It is especially interesting to notice how much the fundamental choice for life I just described earlier seems to be the key for finding a true balance between these different components that can become more compatible when there are combined in a frame regulated by values of a higher order, as the energies described in the comparison between Trinity and Anti-Trinity. Let's examine a few of these polarities and see how their components can be recombined in another way in order to get the best of each model without the negative aspects. This is certainly an ambitious project, but it seems more than possible. It seems even to be the solution we are looking for! Let me convince you!

1) Subsistence or trade

Food production as an answer to basic needs is effortful and tends to be "abandoned" for trade as an easier means for wealth.

Originally traditional societies had to care first for their basic needs, especially for water and food, and for shelter under climates that require protection from heat or cold. The trend nowadays in our western society is to abandon agriculture to specialised people who produce it on a large scale with high range science and technology. And even similarly with industrial production which is left to others

(China, Brazil, India) from whom we buy what we need. Trade becomes the main activity because it allows more profit and more wealth. We have the tendency to avoid any practical activity. We wish becoming rich doing nothing. The shareholder system is the best illustration of this tendency. But what about food? Not only it is a necessity but the fact to grow it ourselves helps us to remain healthy, realistic, in touch with natural cycles. Sustainable agriculture is the support for a deep wisdom which needs to be practised to survive. Food, with water, will soon become the main issue for our survival, because we do not care for them and leave them to monopolies. It is like breathing; you cannot ask your neighbour to do it for you. Subsistence is a deep teaching about our own needs and how they are realistic. It does not mean that we produce everything we need, in autarchy. It means that we need to continue practising what is central in our life or at least remain in touch with this kind of practice.

In other words, food is necessary for survival but it is a bother to produce it oneself. We prefer to leave this responsibility to others who specialise in this type of activity with the most advanced science and techniques. We know the consequences of this choice: it becomes a business which uses all possible means to increase its productivity. Agriculture has become a mining activity, it means an activity that exhausts the natural resources which foster it, although it should be sustainable by excellence. On the other hand monopolies take shape which control our main food resources. Food is no more produced to satisfy the needs of all but for profit. One sixth of the world population starves, one third is undernourished, while the rich nations eat too much or present main problems of obesity.

Food production has to satisfy our basic needs, but it is also a form of practice of wisdom which educates us to be aware of the rhythms of nature. This is the subtle invisible aspect of agriculture: it keeps us in

awareness of our link with the Earth and how much we depend on it. When it is not a production aimed at profit but an answer to our needs for survival, it becomes a school of adaptation, because the maintenance of our surroundings is the condition for our life. This wisdom cannot be bought at the supermarket; it has to be practised.

The necessity to practise the activities which are necessary for our survival is part of our spiritual growth. It teaches us patience, humility, fairness, capacity for adaptation, sense of observation, curiosity, etc. It does not mean that we have to produce everything we need and become fully autarkic. It means that we have to remain sufficiently connected with this activity to remain aware of what it has to teach us. We can combine different forms of agriculture, i.e. a local one for current needs and a broader one for more specialised products; yet food production must remain a basic effort in our life. In cities some community gardens already exist; urban agriculture allows to use parks and space between buildings for food production, making of these surfaces very lively places where people share and cooperate and where “wastes” can be recycled as resources.

Another important aspect of agriculture is the security and sustainability of resources, in order to allow each one to have access to it under fair conditions which escape speculation and use of power. Food is by excellence a gift of nature. It has to be shared in the logic of a good which is common to all.

2) Food or things

The requirement to produce one's own food does not exclude the practice of specialised trades or the access to immaterial goods.

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Does the choice for producing our own food constitute a hindrance for further immaterial developments, for culture, for getting more useful goods? The global approach of subsistence seems to be an understanding of life which leaves space for flexibility, in choices and in all forms of interaction, according to needs and to the principle of care for the whole community as a condition for security for all; it is fundamentally rather this model of flexibility than a rigid model that is caught in poverty and limitation. The logic of subsistence applied to a wider range of physical and existential needs is probably less constraining than any specialised activity in our modern society. It is focused on the needs of the person, the family, the group, on the means which are available and on the restrictions imposed by the system of the laws of nature. Chayanov has described it well precisely as a form of flexibility. Of course a subsistence oriented way of life does not accumulate so much and remains in this way regulated by the constraint of needs: this is another form of freedom in simplicity.

Yet tools, as specialised products that have to be produced by specialised craftsmen, and leisure and culture, as immaterial goods which require also special skills, are also an important component of everyday life; these special goods are also the fruits of a relative specialisation, either of the people or at least of the activities. Whereas a subsistence oriented society is usually not very specialised, specialisation allows a better performance of all members because of the possibility to develop skills as a form of complementarity between peoples and between different forms of craftsmanship. It is why trade is important; it allows exchanges of these skills and each one can better contribute to the wellbeing of all. Good technology is about the clear discernment of the right needs, the right means and the right aims. It is a learning curve to maturity when it is used with awareness. Exchanges are the gate to diversity

and complementarity. They do not need to become a chase for profit. And yet polyvalence remains a great gift.

The lack of specialisation is probably an important limitation of traditional societies. Yet the way of subsistence is the place and the way of life where people learn to develop their different skills because they are in charge of many aspects of their life. Country people have to learn many trades because they do not specialise and there is nobody to do the work for them: they know how to grow their vegetables, repair the roof of their house or build an extension, fell a tree, care for their cattle and help the cow to give birth to a calf, maintain the road, slash a paddock, drive and repair their tractor (if they have one!), etc. A farmer is a generalist; he knows how to do most things for basic living. In this way he has the opportunity to develop many skills and extend the range of what he is able to do. He develops many forms of competence and yet remains rooted in reality, because he has the daily possibility to learn more how to care for most basic needs (food, shelter, health, basic education, kindness, etc).

On the opposite our modern society has developed a way to buy services through money. With cash one can get everything done by anybody else. This is a powerful thing because one can enjoy the specialised skills of so many people who have reached a level of excellence in their own trade or art. Yet it is also a form of disempowerment because one does not develop one's own aptitudes for improved skills and one needs always someone else to do the job which is needed. One has to bring the car to the mechanic, the dog to the vet, or call the roofer, buy the bread from the baker, go to the doctor for the smallest problem. It is fascinating to see how many "slaves" each one of us needs for their survival if one counts the quantity of energy and services which are consumed by our way of

life. It is evident that a wealthy urban inhabitant will consume the services of many people as he lives in a highly specialised context and has easy access to cash, much more than the relatively poor rural inhabitant who has to rely with little cash on his own aptitude and creativity to solve his problems. Money is in this way an important vector for specialisation because the local market place is by excellence the place where specialisations are exchanged. I sell my vegetables and have my shoes repaired by the shoemaker. Exchange is an encouragement for specialisation, and specialisation for excellence, but also for disempowerment.

Specialisation can become a refuge from reality. One learns to do something in order not to have to cope with the complexity of life. If one is not regularly confronted with the test of reality, one has many opportunities to go off the track. Virtuality is a big danger on the way to specialisation. One can withdraw from reality and take refuge in a small world one builds up slowly. Specialised tools help to it. Computers are in this sense a magic tool which easily creates virtuality; one lives then in a world of dreams, enclosed in a cocoon of specialisation which sells wind and hot air.

Nevertheless specialisation is a beautiful way to reach a level of excellence in a given field. It does not mean that the other fields remain unknown; it means only that at least one special field is investigated in a more thorough way. In fact any complex trade or profession needs specialisation to be mastered, and it needs usually years of experience to get to the right level of competence. One cannot improvise to become a physician. This is probably the contradiction of generalist aptitude: it is pretty good in everything but never excellent in anything particular. Hence the rule is to combine the polyvalent activity of people like farmers with the specialised

excellence of artefact, professionalism and art in order to get to excellence level without having to renounce on polyvalence.

Specialisation allows diversity and complementarity which mean extension of the field of knowledge for a given community. This wealth must remain as much as possible accessible for all. The local market place is where these skills are exchanged without falling into the illusion of speculation. When the need governs the exchange, speculation remains low. When greed and will for profit are the main trends for exchanges, speculation develops and specialised services become a privilege which creates a gap between the ones who offer it and the ones who need it. When needs are the leading force for specialisation, the exchange has many opportunities to remain fair and equal, especially on a local level; it is then a form of sharing of competencies, i.e. a sort of gift for the whole community.

3) Work or capital

Nowadays capital is controlling work; yet work is creativity and life. It should be the key, and capital only the well mastered means.

In subsistence societies there is very little possible conversion of work into money and almost no possibility to accumulate capital. Investments are mainly based on work, which is the dominating creative factor, and on natural resources, which are freely available in nature as soon more work makes them usable. A few savings can sometimes help by providing the few accessory goods which are not available on site. The power of money is well under control. Work is the dominating factor which controls the process. On the opposite, in our modern society, because of accumulation, capital has taken over the control of development. Classic economics claim that growth is necessary to provide wealth and growth is made possible only if

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investment is high. Paradoxically investment is not mainly understood as a productive work which provides wellbeing for the majority but as what returns the most important income for the investor. In this way wealth attracts wealth and concentrates while money takes control of work, it means of life. By doing so we sacrifice life to our illusion of infinite growth, which is in any case not sustainable for the simple reason that we live on a limited planet. We kill the potential of work as a creative power of transformation.

Trade societies have always accumulated capital, just in order to produce the means for transport and storage, as well as the necessary funds to buy what would be sold later. On the opposite subsistence societies have always lived with very little cash capital if any, but only with embodied capital, in the form of tools and a minimum of infrastructure. Work was their principal capital to be invested in their own struggle for survival.

Capital, in a wealthy society with a capacity for accumulation, is a fact we cannot deny. The problem is not capital as such, but the use we make of it. Capital has evidently also a capacity to promote harmonious development and positive wellbeing when it is under social control and used for the common good. Capital is destructive in our modern society only because it becomes the dominating instrument of power. It is indeed only money which has to be used to a good and creative end. When it is used properly, capital can even become a vector for more justice. Good investments allow to correct imbalances, repair damages, offer new opportunities for poor people. The use of capital depends on the choice, and the choice on the right understanding and the courage to do the right thing. Investments in our society are nothing else than the reflection of our priorities and values. The landscape is the image of our society. Harmonious

development generates a beautiful landscape. Ugliness in industrial zones is the product of greed and domination.

Work, and not capital, is our true energy of life, our true human power for creating a suitable world. It is evident that the value of work, as energy of life, is much more essential and central to our wellbeing than capital. It is why it should be a priority to implement measures for controlling capital as a simple tool to be used for common good. This option is evidently very far from the practice of market which makes workforce a simple good to be sold. The key for a change towards a better control of capital is the value itself of work to become central in our common choices about the type of society we wish to have: do we want to sell life in order to make more money and run behind the illusion of an infinite growth which never comes, or do we want to protect work, as we dare still to protect life, as a precious value which is fruit bearing and life giving? Asking the question is already a way to answer it. What does prevent the right choice? Probably our ignorance, our indecision, our cowardice are more the resisting factors than any other possible objective obstacle. We have just the society we create... if we really want to create it. The problem is probably that we secretly still hope that infinite growth is possible and we remain more attached to our material comfort than to our human creativity or to a true possibility for new ways of expression or to our attraction for a common adventure where we would all be solidary. It seems that our human ambivalence about what we wish for ourselves is the main key. Then, as a second order of determining forces, come the power and mechanisms of a capitalist system which imposes its law and will, in the hands of a tiny minority of wealthy people. But nevertheless, all of us, in fact, we seem to be lost sheep who do not know what we want. The true obstacle is this deep resignation we abide to. It is why resistance to the dominating system of exploitation seems to get ever weaker.

4) Creativity or production

Not production but the satisfaction of basic needs is the purpose; and the creative aspect of work is the key of the way to plenitude.

As it has been repeated many times, our present production system is guided by the want for profit. The purpose of the contractor is to produce as much as possible, at the lowest cost, for selling as cheap goods as possible in big quantities. Nowadays the quantity is the key for profit; therefore goods must be cheap so that people buy them easily and often. In order to reduce the costs, the quality is reduced to its minimum; the components are degraded to the limit of depriving the good of its functionality. Bad quality must be replaced often, but, as people tend more and more to buy many times what is cheap than once for ever what is of good quality, the benefit is double for the contractor: the good costs less (more profit) and lasts less (numerous sales). We have to convert this process based on the logic of production (profit for the contractor) to a process based on the criteria of satisfaction of basic needs (wellbeing of the user) and yet apply the knowledge accumulated through the production process. In this purpose quality becomes the key factor for goods which fit their function and last longer. Creativity becomes the necessary condition because the goods can meet their purpose and will be durable, it means be cheaper on longer term. Workers are valorised by what they produce if the quality is good. In this new logic, the process of transformation (no more called production) answers principally the needs of the worker to participate creatively in the transformation and to be recognised and valued for what he brings into it. The quality of work conditions and the creativity of the work as a contribution to the common good (hence recognition of the actors) become the fundamental criteria which reorganise the chain of transformation.

Trade has developed specialisation, it means excellence in trade, which would mean also good conditions for practising this trade if excellence has to be achieved. Yet the pressure of capital has deeply degraded this precious opportunity for excellence. There must certainly be a way to combine the faculty for specialisation and excellence in trade societies with the content for meaning that work has generally in subsistence societies. When the capital and financial efficiency are no more the leading forces of market, work can reintegrate its full mission and become a creative way for personal expression.

It does not mean that each work offers a possibility for creativity, because some jobs are inevitably boring or dirty or repetitive and give no pleasure; yet each of us does this kind of jobs every day at home or by necessity, such as emptying the composting toilet or cleaning the grease trap; when there is an evident necessity to act, it is easily done, especially when it does not define the personal status of the one who does it. Despite the fact that the want for creativity cannot impact on every type of work, it means that each work process should be planned according to the needs of the workers who can expect the best possible conditions as they have been made free from the domination of capital and its requirements for financial return. Work is then understood firstly as essential condition of life for the worker and secondly as a process which has at the same time to be financially possible and to answer the needs of the users. It has also to integrate into the natural cycles and be in harmony with the wellbeing of the local community. It can at this stage become the means for social linking and recognition I have just described earlier. This logic is evidently far from what is practised today but it makes so much common sense that it is hard to believe that it could be

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opposed for other reasons than the vested interests or the personal privileges it would go against.

5) Autocracy or democracy

Democracy is understood as a struggle for power by the majority. Yet only consensus (i.e. compromise) allows minorities to be heard.

Trade has favoured democracy, yet democracy in Antic Greece or in 19th century England was a democracy for the rich; not all citizens had equal rights. Rights were linked with ownership and wealth or social status. In this spirit of rivalry democracy is in most cases understood as a power struggle between opposed groups of interest. Traditional societies have generally learned to reach a form of consensus, probably because of the reduced possibilities which were offered to them and because their fragility required the support of all. Democracy is in fact more a culture than a political system. People need to be informed and educated, how to form an opinion in order to take decisions and to perceive beforehand the foreseeable consequences. Nowadays vested interests, privately owned medias, conflicts of privileges, political corruption have invaded the field of decision-making and these forces try to control public opinion or the way people come to a point of view. There is no true debate between parties.

The best possible model for true democracy is maybe the Swiss model of the “Landsgemeinde” (as it has been practised for centuries) where people on the market place discuss issues and vote in direct democracy. There is no delegation of power. Everyone takes their stand in full transparency and in a dynamic balance of diversity yet in evident need for a relative consensus. This model should be inspiring the transformation we need nowadays in our degraded political

systems. We have to dissociate the practice of democracy from our ingrained will for power; this seems to be a contradiction but it is in perfect accord with the remark of Voltaire (not the literal quote!): I disapprove what you are saying but I will nevertheless struggle until my last breath for you to be able to express it. Democracy in fact is not about dominating the debate; it is about the right of minorities to see their point of view respected. Consensus is in this sense the synthesis of all points of view. It requires courage and discernment to defend which aspects of diversity must be respected and to make concession on what can be considered as more flexible.

We have the tendency to resume democracy to the count of votes out of which the majority faction is the winner. But this is no democracy, this is only the power of the most numerous part of the voters – who are usually only a part of the citizens and a still smaller part of the whole population, which includes children and strangers who usually have no right to express their opinion. It is not rare to see a “majority” elected by 51% of the voters who form only 30% of the citizens (i.e. 30% of participation – when vote is not compulsory) who represent only 70% of the population (proportion of citizens). It means altogether an election by 12% of the concerned people!

The art of democracy and of true consensus is a whole culture by itself. The legal system facilitates its expression or does not; yet only the maturity of the community can allow true consensus to take shape. Consensus is a difficult art because it means compromises and concessions. It means one renounces everything which is not essential in order to meet the other, the one who thinks differently and has another opinion. It is not a power struggle but a search for balance.

The best level for the best decision is always the lowest level of hierarchy. It means that each field of competence should be treated at the most local level. At the nearest to the grassroots level one finds the best competence and the best experience. Where people are directly concerned, they know about their situation and are able to take decisions. Decisions concerning the primary school can be taken at local level because it is at the local level that one finds many children and their parents who are directly concerned, whereas decisions concerning universities can be only taken at a regional level, because they concern a wider range of people on a broader portion of land. Highways planning needs coordination on a regional level while their maintenance is a more local concern. The rule of the decision on the lowest level allows consensus to arise in smaller communities, at the best level of competence. It creates also diversity because each local community will treat each question in a different way.

At a higher level delegation and representation are needed. This role can be considered as a social duty and can be entrusted to competent, ethical or representative people, rather than to professional politicians. The practice of this role can also be considered as an opportunity for training and developing new personal skills, to be offered to a member of the community who can be chosen for his aptitude to learn and be receptive. In this case the mission fosters the skills instead of the contrary.

True democracy is the place for the expression and respect of minorities. Only negotiated consensus is able to integrate a complex balance of different points of view. Consensus is a practice of negotiation. In this way it is a bit similar to trade (*negotium* in Latin), and it is why trade has tremendously helped democracy to take shape. But there is a fundamental difference: trade aims at own profit while

true democracy aims at the balance between extremes; it aims at the common good where everyone has to find more or less their own satisfaction.

6) Welfare or wealth

When growth and wealth are the leading forces of a community, the capacity (awareness) to care for the welfare of all is impaired.

Seashore and backcountry societies differ in the way that the continental government is usually centralised and tends to administrate the whole territory it has to rule, while in seashore societies the tension between political and trade powers creates a kind of rivalry of domination between the two acting forces, the political and the economic. It is why social welfare is generally better cared for in the former than the latter. Care for welfare is essential for all because it avoids the poorer and weaker to fall out of the net. As I described it earlier about the market, it happens usually that private interest leaves it to public interest to care for the weak: limiting the destructions caused by private interest and repairing the damages. Yet a community, if it cares for all, acts in a different spirit: it is not about limiting and repairing but about creating the best conditions for all to thrive and be happy.

The Finish school system is well known to care for equality of chances for all and it is evidently successful because it is a priority in the way this society functions. Welfare in this case is much more than a restriction for trade action; it is really a constructive social aim, a basic political option for a precise quality of society, for a special way of living together. It is truly what politics should aim at: the common good, more than the struggle between conflicting interests.

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This difference is crucial because it shows how politics (the art of creating a harmonious society) has to be the leading force in control of economics (the art of providing the necessary goods and services). It means that the art of providing the necessary goods and services can only be practised in a harmonious way if it is guided by a deep understanding of life and especially of life as a community. Every time we let economic forces dominate our life, we lose a bit of humanity. Economic constraints such as the necessity to provide everyone with the necessary food, shelter, health, education can only be answered in a well-defined cultural frame which allows main human values, like justice, equity, peace, non-violence, to define the frame of our community life. In other words our spiritual values must impose a strict frame and limitation to the impact of material factors. It does not mean that such material factors are neglected or ignored; it means only that they are considered and treated in reference to the criteria of quality of life we want to achieve.

This necessity for a clear political frame means that a vision of the type of society we wish to implement needs to be clarified between the members of the concerned community. This need for a clear perspective requires from the community to debate which type of vision will guide the future evolution. This is evidently a long process that requires from all members to learn about politics and to become personally aware of what is favourable for the common good and how to negotiate and achieve consensus. Politics becomes part of culture and relationships. Abstention remains evidently a right not to take part. Yet every abstention weakens the whole process, because cohesion (i.e. wholehearted adhesion) is an important strength of consensus.

7) Equality or domination

The main strength of a community is its consensus for equity and non-violence that makes sharing and common wealth possible.

Trade has generated domination because domination is ingrained in the spirit of competition. In fact exchanges and trade do not need the stress of competition or the attraction for profit to become possible. This is proved by the local market in its original form aimed at satisfying basic needs inasmuch as it is based on the logic of complementarity of needs and skills, instead of the force of domination and greed. We can observe how exchanges based on generosity and on care for equity are materially and humanely much richer than the kind of attempt for domination that we practise today. Restraint in power is a trait of maturity. Aspiration for equality is the base for peace. I have described how more equal societies are better thriving than unequal ones. In this sense self-restraint, care and will for sharing offer more wealth.

Trade societies are usually shown as great examples of civilisation because they could accumulate wealth and create impressive cities and cultural centres. Babylon, Rome, Florence have always constituted references for good development. The seduction of wealth and beauty of arts is powerful: it is evidently not empty of content. Italy has built its capacity for producing sheer beauty, in so many varied forms, on its trade faculty and the resulting wealth. That was the time when princes were sensitive to beauty and intellectual culture. This is sadly no more the case of the leading economic forces today which seem to be ready to kill father and mother to get where they want to.

In a contrasting way, fragile traditional societies have always kept a deep sense of equity because their own stability was depending on

the capacity of all to be contributing to the common effort. It did not mean everything was shared. The chiefs or leaders or powerful had more wealth than the others; yet sharing was the rule because of the fragile context and harsh conditions for survival. In a certain way sharing played then the role of our modern welfare system.

The tremendous increase in production and in health since the industrial revolution has generated more powerful ways to create a gap between rich and poor. As I showed earlier, it is striking to notice how for instance the society in England around eighteen hundred has immediately put in place measures to resist the trend for inequity (with for instance the Poor Law at Speenhamland) before even the tendencies for imbalances became too evident.

The choice for equity and non-violence is typically an option which belongs to politics. It is the free choice of a given community to include these options as leading references in its choices or on the contrary to let economy lead the trend. Maturity and experience show nevertheless that the ability of a community to control its development opens the doors to welfare, common wealth and more wellbeing; i.e. the many possible “well”!

8) Stability or diversity

Traditional teaching can prevent change, yet it offers guidance (to be reinterpreted); how can it combine with opening to diversity?

Rural societies are known to be more conservative and closed to external influences. Yet they suffer from being so limited in their exchanges. Their members express often the need to “open the window for fresh air”. It means that traditional structures can be very oppressing. Yet traditional societies have usually a clearer pattern

how human values need to be promoted. There is intrinsically a respect for the immaterial qualities of life which need to be protected and maintained alive, even if these values have been rigidified in conservative and sclerotic principles; there is also a strong model of consensus which we have lost in our modern society, where the flatland of a false freedom (do what you are pleased) has replaced an inspiring form of general teaching about the meaning of life; this kind of teaching, in a trade society, is dominated by the values the market imposes. Despite the fact that they are poorer in their spiritual teaching, trade societies are nevertheless more open to diversity because trade brings them in touch with other cultures and countries; this experience of diversity is rich because it introduces other patterns of thinking and living; it brings in this way inspiring challenges and - when it is considered in a mature spirit and not with the will to dominate – this other way of understanding life awakes in us a deep sense of how much our decisions are narrowly related to our very partial and subjective way of understanding the world. This potential of teaching about diversity and the perception of the necessity for respect of the differences of points of view should go against the tendency of trade to standardise ways of life and cultural or spiritual understandings of life.

Traditional societies used to have very clear values; they had very clear ethical positions about all the main topics of life. Religion, when it is reduced to a moralistic code, becomes also the protector of status quo. Yet religion in its deep meaning is not a catalogue of answers; it is indeed mainly a way of questioning and a steep challenge to live a true life which goes often against the conservative spirit of privileges and the mentality of a society that looks for easy solutions. Religion, when it is practised in a true spirit of freedom, becomes a very radical way of life which questions most attitudes of our comfort society. It is tragic to notice how much the forces of

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market and globalisation have created nowadays a globalised flat landscape where everything seems to have equal value, denying even the most precious aspirations in the name of realism and resignation about a world where idealism is considered as an impossible dream.

Who are the inspiring people of our world today who can become models for the young generation? Tenzin Gyatso the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, Desmond Tutu, and who else? It seems we live in a desert where nobody becomes famous for being inspiring; traditional teaching has disappeared from everyday life. Most spiritual guidance is considered obsolete or moralistic. Yet our youth have nobody to turn to in order to find their way into life. We have lost the capacity for wisdom because we have sacrificed it to our comfort.

If trade has imposed its destructive law of profit and of levelling down, it has also opened the doors of our rich nations to ethnic and cultural diversity. The 15th and 16th centuries have discovered parts of the world we did not know; it has been an amazing experience of opening to new ways of life, to new understandings. Yet we have done our possible to control this diversity. Our rich nations have felt they had to “civilize” these new countries, while in fact these other cultures had long ago developed their own wisdom and knew how to lead their youth into adulthood. Globalisation intensifies nowadays these links, yet in a spirit of domination which is deaf to the languages of these nations which do not say the same as we do.

In other words our power and wealth, our technology and our good weapons have allowed us to conquer new territories, but we missed the opportunity to be open and to be taught. After long years of talking about developing countries, we have learned that they represent unfathomable treasures of knowledge while our own power

and wealth has downtrodden our own faculty to search for Truth. Evidently there is a middle way between the extremely conservative movement of tradition and the possibility to be inspired by what we have inherited from our ancestors. Certainly we have to readapt this teaching to the present days, but nevertheless Truth remains what it is; only the way to search for it or to express it can evolve. The unchanging Reality remains. It is our role to learn more about it, to put it at the centre of our life, and to transmit it to further generations. This is true creativity and constant transformation: a steep challenge for our comfort society how to come back to life.

9) Identity or hospitality

Group identity usually defines itself over against “the other”; yet poor societies show how hospitality is the richest way to diversity.

I just described how diversity comes to us as a rich challenge. On the other hand trade countries are exposed to diversity to a point where they even react aggressively to too many foreigners “invading” their space. The crisis that western countries experience with the influx of migrants from the South countries is very significant. Trade has generated colonialism which inevitably calls people from the colonies to the metropolis. This is an unavoidable aspect of the law of attraction for domination. The links that trade creates have to profit everybody, both ways and not only the takers. How much is there a right to close the door to these newcomers?

It seems that these questions of capacity for integration depend mainly on the sense of identity of the community which has to integrate so many foreign people. Does it need to be an identity based on the feeling “us against them”? Identity is grounded in being, as I have described it; it does not need to be special, because it is given by

the simple fact we exist. Yet in our too frequent position of doubt we need signs for its expression to make us feel more secure of what we are.

Despite this subjective need, more hospitable societies do not seem to be given a stronger sense of identity than others which are more defensive. They are just more peaceful and probably less intoxicated by external competition and market values. The market, with its globalisation forces, is not a constructive help to encourage people feeling good. The more trade opens borders, the more people take refuge in their local identity which they may forge “against the other” when there is no better way to ground it into true being.

In fact the health of the identity of a community is certainly linked with its awareness, its maturity, its sense of equity, its capacity to care for one another. The faculties to resist the flattening effects of globalisation and the capacity to avoid levelling on the lowest denominator seem to be precisely the forces that make identity stronger, i.e. communities which are more mature and therefore more welcoming to the stranger. In this way the opening to diversity and external influences becomes true enrichment for the welcoming community and can generate changes without them being a threat. In history it is striking to see how much countries which used to welcome refugees have inherited a lot of constructive energy and a lot of skills from this new input; most of them like Holland, Switzerland and Germany became quite wealthy, and probably partly because of this.

Most people who travelled in poor countries have been impressed how they have been invited by people who did not know them and offered them the best they had: food, hospitality, presents, etc. In Islamic countries the stranger is considered as sent by Allah. What a

beautiful way to look at the other, instead of considering him or her as a threat or even as the enemy!

It is strange how much our modern way of life, which is more secure than anything we have known before, is based on reflexes of fear. It seems as if we were unable to trust the person we do not know.

Modern politics is based on the culture of fear: fear of terrorism, fear of asylum seekers, fear of the homeless... Hospitality is the best way to react and to learn trust. We discover the others as human beings who are so similar to us in most aspects of their life. We break in this way the ready-made pattern of who the other is. Direct contact teaches us the familiarity of similitudes and the pleasure of differences.

In conclusion of this short journey through these few polarities, it seems that more maturity in the awareness of our community allows more subtle combinations of parameters or attitudes which seemed at first view incompatible.

A different way of sharing

After having described how our way of looking at things changes our perception and our action and how our patterns of reference influence our choices, I will show how different categories of goods have to be handled differently because they are of very different natures.

The 4 categories of goods

Some goods are destroyed when divided; some have to be shared to take shape; some truly multiply when shared; others diminish.

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We can distinguish four categories of goods:

- 1) The first category of goods includes all the goods which are destroyed when they are divided. These are all the goods which form an indivisible entity because they have their significance and function as a whole, such as all the global equilibriums which regulate the universe, the laws of nature, the ecosystems, the rhythms of the cosmos and of nature, and the process of renewal of all natural resources which are provided by our environment.
- 2) The second category includes all the goods which need to be shared in order to take shape. These are all the qualities which can exist only if many people have part in them, such as peace, justice, equity, beauty, friendship, love.
- 3) The third category includes all the goods which multiply when they are shared. These are all the immaterial fields of culture and relationships such as knowledge, creativity, understanding, awareness, wisdom, generosity, which increase, and even multiply, when more people have part in them.
- 4) The fourth category includes the goods which diminish when they are shared or divided and which become scarce. These are the material goods whose total quantity can only be divided in smaller lots between the partakers. The more numerous are the people who share them, the more these goods need to be divided into many parts, and the smaller part each one receives. They are the limited material goods, such as the cake kids share at a birthday party, or a certain quantity of items in a basket.

The inspiration for these different categories of goods comes from a work group called the Alliance for a Responsible and Solidary World (Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme, Paris).

In fact these goods combine one with another without end. For instance a book is a material good (4) which contains knowledge (3), is made out of paper (1) and can spread an intention of justice (2). These four different natures combine in one single item.

It is also interesting to notice that each of these categories of goods has another way of being exchanged or shared.

This is what we will now examine in more detail for each of these categories.

1) Goods which cannot be divided unless destroyed

Some goods form an entity which cannot be subdivided without being destroyed: all the laws of equilibrium and life resources.

In the first category of goods we have all the equilibriums and the laws of nature which regulate the rhythms of the universe, the general balances of our environment and the rhythms of renewal of life resources. They constitute one single and indissociable entity which has its function as an indivisible whole. They are the leading forces of our world and of life. We have to adapt to them. They are the laws which are regulating the rhythms of our Earth and Universe, the rhythms of years, seasons, cycles of draughts and floods, alternation of day and night, renewal of resources, absorption of wastes. All main natural resources which are essential for life such as water, air, sun, earth, forests, food, biodiversity, energy, are belonging to this category as well as all the resources the Earth makes available for us and which are not renewable such as all the minerals, the fuel, the coal and similar. This is the most important wealth which cannot be owned individually. It is by excellence a common good, precisely

called the commons, which must remain accessible for all and respected as a whole.

These goods form an indissociable whole because they constitute a system as such; they are only the visible parts of a wider body we have difficulty to discern because we cannot see all the connections of interdependence of its parts. It means that these resources can only be used in regard to the system as a whole in order not to endanger the general balance. The system, although it is not visible as such, is the ruling law of this whole.

Considering the system as a whole is precisely what we do not do. We use water where it is available without caring whether we leave enough of it in the system: water on the Earth is like blood in our body. If there is not enough left, the whole body is in danger. Water is life and vital for all. It has to remain accessible for all in equality. In the same way, mineral resources are taken out of the ground without consideration for what is left for future generations. Not only we deplete the resources, but we destroy the system. By depletion of some of its essential parts it is in danger of not functioning as a whole anymore.

Our climate is in danger of collapsing because our use of energy goes beyond what is tolerable. Many laws are regulating the general balances of our universe and of our Earth. They are life. They have established themselves through millenniums and still never stop evolving. They define the laws to which we have to adapt. They are the supreme good and the first category of goods because they constitute the material form of what provides life for all. Destroying these goods means killing life.

These goods are so essential that they can only remain one whole and cannot be owned by anybody. They are by excellence the common good, i.e. the commons.

2) Goods which take shape when shared

Some goods can only take shape when they are shared: these are the qualities of our social life such as justice, peace, love, beauty.

In the second category of goods we have the goods which make the qualities of our social life and can exist only if they are shared. Not only these goods are not diminished by the fact they are shared, but they need to be shared in order to take shape, it means to become reality. Without sharing, these goods cannot exist because they qualify the relationships between people. These are the qualities such as peace and justice or love. Peace can only exist when it is reciprocal, if both enemies reconcile. It is in the sharing of a reconciling relationship that peace can arise, take shape and develop. These goods are also parts of the common good, of the commons.

These goods not only need to be shared in order to take shape, they are also givers of life. They cannot be owned by anybody because they happen between people. Certainly they have instigators who generate these qualities more than others, but these people, even if they are absolutely necessary for the quality to arise, are not the owners or the creators of it. They are only a kind of catalyst for something which happens in the gap between people. This gap is in fact more inhabited than one thinks because it is the link which relates each of us to our neighbours. As we are ourselves parts of a whole we form one body, one single body of humanity. The goods

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we are talking of are precisely making the special quality of these connections which link us and make us all solidary.

Each of these goods remains dead if it is not shared. Wisdom is wisdom only if it is implemented in our relationships; if not it remains theoretical knowledge how to behave. Justice is justice only if it makes relationships more equal and transparent; if not it remains a hollow principle. Love is love only if it makes other people feel valued and respected; if not it remains a dry intention.

3) Goods which multiply when shared

Some goods multiply in width and depth in the same proportion as they are shared: such are the different aspects of knowledge.

In the third category of goods, we have the goods which multiply and get more depth and intensity when they are shared. This is the case for knowledge. The more it spreads, the more it enriches people. The more people are enriched, the more they contribute to it and the more there is knowledge. It means these goods are multiplied, extended and nourished by the fact they are shared. Too often they are kept secret, as corporation's ownership or as private power, but these unnatural practices make knowledge something much smaller than it is, because it is considered in this case as a privilege and as a tool for competition and domination, as something more exclusive than inclusive. In its essence, knowledge is made to be shared because it is also a part of the commons. We learn to walk, to speak, to relate to one another in the cradle of our families and smaller communities. This is an heritage which needs to be transmitted, i.e. shared with future generations, and still more with contemporaries because sharing allows it to be constantly renewed, recreated, reinvented.

This category of goods seems at first glance very similar to the precedent one, yet it differs in an important way. In the precedent category goods had to be shared in order to take shape; without sharing they could not exist. In the present category, these goods can exist without being shared, yet they have an incredible faculty to multiply and increase in depth and intensity when they are shared.

Many corporations try to patent many aspects of natural processes or inventions which include also a major part of natural or human heritage. How can one patent an OGM seed without patenting the seed itself which has been given by nature, as well as all forces which make the seed grow such as the power of the Earth, the sun and the water? How can one in this process patent the result of the seed without patenting also all the discoveries of sciences or even of humanity which the scientists who have “developed” this seed have learned at school, at university, as part of human knowledge and thanks to public institutions.

Knowledge is clearly a common field for the whole of humanity. It has to be made accessible for all. It is why education is so important. It provides each one with the best means for life. It multiplies, because when one child learns to write and to count he or she starts an evolution which has no end. The richer this child becomes in terms of knowledge, the more he or she will contribute to the welfare of humanity. This is absolutely evident!

And, more than anything else, the knowledge of the heart is what we all need to develop. And this can only happen when we support each other on this search and discovery.

4) Goods which diminish when shared

Some goods diminish when they are shared: these are all the material goods. Avoiding their division can make them more available.

In the fourth category of goods we have the material goods which really diminish when they are shared. They are like a cake; if more people share it, each one gets a lesser portion. This shrinking in sharing is true for all the resources and it means that we have to consume them with self-restraint in an aware consideration for the total quantity which remains available or being renewed by nature. This is mainly the case for the goods we consume and transform for our living. In fact these basic goods are very few and are not needed in great quantities: this is principally food and water. Other goods of this kind that we do not transform by consuming them but we use for our diverse activities are the items we use for personal care, like clothes or shelter. The further away we go from our own intimate skin, the more the goods we need are able to be shared, borrowed, or in common access. This is true for most of our tools for instance. It is why common access for use is the solution for making less disturbing the tendencies these goods have to shrink when shared.

This is often said: love is not like a cake one shares. A mother can have many children and love them equally. Their respective share of love will not be diminished proportionally to the number of children. The availability of the mother for each one in terms of time maybe will be reduced, but the total love won't. The goods we are now examining are not of this type. They are precisely diminished by sharing. It is important to see that the act of sharing is not as necessary as we think. As it has been described earlier, free access to use makes goods more available than private property. This is the general rule. It cannot be applied in the same way to all items, to my tooth brush as to my chain saw. It is what is fascinating in this rule: it

challenges us to dare more in order to become richer. Daring more, it means inventing new ways of sharing instead of falling back onto the known ways of private property. This is the challenge. We are free to answer it as we want to. It becomes then a social adventure. This is precisely what allows a community to grow in maturity.

The 4 ways to share goods

For each category of goods a proper way to be shared: respect of wholeness, a quality implemented together, free exchange, sharing.

The four categories of goods we have just described have their respective ways to be shared. The suitable rules for sharing are concerning two ranges of criteria: on the one hand the key of repartition between protagonists and on the other hand the modalities for exchanges. Rules for sharing and rules for exchange are different.

Let's describe in more detail these rules for the repartition and for the exchanges of these four categories of goods.

1) Respect of the whole + restrained equal access

General equilibriums must be respected as whole systems. The life supporting goods they produce (food) must be shared in equity.

As it has been said, the goods which cannot be divided unless destroyed have to be respected as indivisible whole systems; they constitute the principal heritage of humanity.

- Key of repartition: There is no possible sharing of these precious forces. Despite the fact these main equilibriums cannot be shared, their fruits can be shared and have to remain accessible for all,

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especially because they represent invaluable necessities for life: water, food and other basic resources which cannot yet be consumed at a quicker rhythm than they are renewed. Equality is the key of repartition, in a spirit of self-restraint and adaptation.

- Exchanges must tend towards equalising what nature has produced in a concentration which does not follow the density of population, because this density is mainly manmade as the fruit of urbanisation or of procreation which are not ruled directly by nature. Localisation and seasonal harvests have to be corrected by transport.

Water in a Saharan oasis is shared according to a very sophisticated system of combs and channels and a strict control of timing, managed by the community according to the quantities which are available at each time. It is exactly what our modern services for water should do. But the tendency is now to privatise these services and many categories of people are left behind, either because they are poor or because they are settled too far away from the source or the network for these new private corporations to bother for them.

2) A quality to be implemented together + reciprocity

Immaterial qualities arise because all together we give them a shape; they arise in open sharing and reciprocity; all take part in it.

As it has been said, the goods which take shape when shared need the participation of all; they are truly the expression of the maturity of a community and present an image of the wisdom of the community as a synthesis.

- Key of repartition: These goods are the similar immaterial correspondent to the equilibriums of the precedent category; they

are the invisible qualities of the laws of the cosmos: love, peace, joy, justice. They are the general expression of wisdom. All members of the community take part in their expression and give them a shape all together. The participation of all is needed.

- Exchanges are the means through which they become real; it means that each one of these goods needs at least two actors and the space between them to flourish. The more they are exchanged and shared, the more they take shape, the more people take part in them, the more they spread and the more they extend and gain in depth and width. Reciprocity is the condition for their existence, and the rule for their exchange, because this is a condition for them to exist that the exchanges go both ways.

The market pretends to regulate our relationships according to the classic theory of the self-regulating ability of market. But this is a lie. The experience proves that free market can only create long term imbalances such as poverty and destruction, or excessive wealth concentrations. We need wisdom to regulate our lives and this is an immaterial quality which is a leading force of the universe (or life), despite the fact it is not visible or material. All the qualities which are concerned in this category are precisely immaterial values which rule our world. We have evacuated them because they do not fit well into the logic of market exchanges; market is a very gross and disturbing caricature of life. It is why the community has to control the market because only our social maturity, when implemented together, is able to control the energies of market.

It is important to see that wisdom or justice or peace or love are not products of a privileged class who would be constituted by the wise people who know. Certainly in each society there are teachers and prophets, but wisdom is nevertheless the work of all together. All are involved because the creation of this quality happens in the

relationships, as it has been described earlier. It means that these qualities are the expression of the state of our society in general, as a synthesis of what we are as a whole. What is appalling in the strong dominance of our society by the mechanisms of market is that it prevents a true evolution of our human qualities. Justice, peace, love are discarded as if they could only take shape in the protected bosom of the family. This is a very sad twist of our life conditions.

The qualities of justice, peace and love arise only in reciprocity. Only if I am in peace with you and you are in peace with me, there is true peace between us. Reciprocity is the quality of the way they have to be shared.

3) Free access + free exchange

Common goods like knowledge multiply when they are shared; their access and exchange have to remain free and common for all.

As it has been said, the goods which multiply when shared need to be accessible for all, freely. Exchange stimulates their development and the possibilities to access them.

- Key of repartition: As they multiply when shared, these goods are very easy to share. Education makes knowledge available to all. More knowledge stimulates more knowledge. The more it is shared, the more it can develop and stimulate the inner growth of people. It is why open access to education is always a beautiful privilege, not only for the ones who have access to it but for all the members of the community. Knowledge is like a boomerang. It comes back in an enriched way to the one who gives it. It is the best example of the advantages of sharing which constitutes enrichment for all.

- Exchanges have to remain free and accessible for all because it helps these goods to multiply.

Knowledge is the pure produce of a collective body. We get taught very early at school about the heritage of humanity, in terms of sciences, art, techniques, ethics, philosophy, spirituality. The purpose of education is to provide people with the best tools in order for them to have the best possible ability to serve their community in a wise and creative way. Exchange of knowledge makes it open and available for all. Free exchange is even the condition for knowledge to develop and to be nourished by all. If sharing is prevented, knowledge gets poorer.

Intellectual property is in most cases a form of speculation because any knowledge is basically nourished by the community and by human heritage. Without the basic acquisition of reading and writing there would be almost no invention. There is a deep contradiction in intellectual property: the one who has received the most from the collective effort of education can take most advantage of his position and privilege. In fact the more we receive from our community, the more we are meant to give back through the quality of our creativity and what we offer in our services.

Yet intellectual property is meant to be a positive means for compensating for the time needed for creation. Creation needs time and time of subsistence needs means for subsistence. It is why intellectual property can have a sense, and this form of support of the community to help creativity is an absolute necessity. But in most cases intellectual property is more exploited as a means to make profit out of something which has been provided by society.

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4) Self-restraint and equity + common access

Goods which diminish when shared need to be used with restraint; they diminish less when their access remains open to all.

As it has been said, these goods are the material goods which need to be used in respect of the needs of the others because they diminish if too many people take their private share of them.

- Key of repartition: Because of their limited quantity their sharing must be done in a spirit of equity. Share and care! The more their access remains open to all, the more people can enjoy their use.
- Exchanges: When their access remains common, because their use is not restricted by private property, they do not diminish so drastically. This is the law of preference of use over property.

When goods are scarce, people fight and privileges play an important role. With this category of goods which diminish when shared, the challenge is to reinforce the practice of equity and sharing each time competition tends to increase. The reverse trend of sharing has to be therefore implemented, with more control by the community. This control is more of social nature than a police action! It is about creating the right awareness so that the members of the community understand well how much there is to gain in dividing the goods in an equal and just way.

The advantages of access to use over private property have been already well developed in the precedent pages.

All goods are not of equal value and necessity. Food and water are a priority as well as shelter and health or education. Luxury goods are not a necessity. It means that the rules for sharing are different for each type of goods. A balanced way of sharing is the opportunity to

implement the goods of the second category that we have just defined: the qualities which take shape when shared. Scarcity of the goods of the fourth category allows qualities of the second category to be made active. Scarcity is an opportunity for wisdom.

The vernacular model or practice of subsistence

After describing on the one hand the main choices that we have to make and commit to in order to implement the conditions for a better future and after distinguishing on the other hand the different types of goods and how we have to relate to them, we have now to examine the different qualities of the vernacular economic model because it illustrates an alternative way for relating to goods and exchanges as well as to other human beings which does not run through market mechanisms.

The word *vernacular* comes from the Latin *verna* which refers to the slave born at home. The vernacular economy is the activity of transformation and creation which happens at home, it means outside the influences of market. It refers mainly to the economy which does not use money for exchanges but satisfies needs directly by its own production or by barter; this is true for the production for subsistence, when for instance one grows one's own vegetables and raises some cattle for one's own consumption. Subsistence economy is usually perceived as a very frugal way of life because it is often confused with self-sufficiency. Yet subsistence economy can be very abundant. In all children books it is the talk about Uncle McDonald's farm where all kinds of animals are to be found. This is, in one sense, the place of plenty, especially because subsistence economy does not exclude the complementary practice of market exchanges which

would provide the more specialised goods self-sufficiency cannot create by itself.

In the following description of vernacular economy I will proceed in a similar way as I did for our description of market economy. In order to describe the influences of market I did not describe the market as such, because it is difficult to identify it in its pure state, but I described its mechanisms as forces which tend to invert powerfully the natural trends of life. I painted a negative picture of market by describing the negative impact of market mechanisms although these mechanisms can rarely be identified as the pure will of contractors but are nevertheless recognisable as shaping forces of what happens in market economy. In what concerns vernacular economy I will proceed in a similar way. I will not try to describe vernacular economy as a palpable reality but I will describe the model towards which it tends, it means the archetype of vernacular living, which cannot be found anywhere in its pure state. I will paint a positive image of this model as something which should inspire our behaviour and choices. I will even describe each characteristic of the vernacular model as a way of resistance to the main inversions created by market mechanisms, i.e. as a force which maintains life despite the destructive influence of market forces. In these two ways to proceed about market and vernacular economy there is at the start a personal stand which is negative about the influences of the mechanisms of market, because market economy is seen as being a twist of life, while the stand is positive about the vernacular model, because it is considered as being life giving. The two descriptions try to justify this double stand. This philosophical starting point and personal choice is at the same time the reason why I describe these two opposed models as I do and also the aim of the demonstration. This is the message which is subjective and cannot be demonstrated, because

it is related with a wider understanding of the meaning of life, although it can be argued about in many different ways.

The 8 qualities of the vernacular model

Vernacular economy is an all-encompassing generous feminine caring way of providing all members with quality goods of all sorts.

This initial summary description seems, and probably is, very idealistic and evidently does not correspond to the reality; yet it gives a concise idea of what vernacular economy tends to be in its ideal, as a model more than as an everyday reality. The quality of this type of production and exchanges is difficult to define because it is mainly related to the way it is practised; it means it depends on the attitude and personality of the people who practise it. Nevertheless I believe we can try to grasp the general intention in defining 8 main traits of character:

- 1) Home economy happens outside market, it means mainly without money conversion, in a practice of reciprocity, of accessibility and of common wealth, as a way of resistance to appropriation.
- 2) It is oriented towards subsistence and regulated by the satisfaction of real needs, as a way of resistance to speculation.
- 3) It adapts to the laws of nature because it is dependent on the respect of, and care for, the environment, as a way of resistance to destruction.
- 4) It is a practice of self-limitation (by necessity or by choice), as a way of resistance to accumulation and waste.
- 5) It is rather process oriented than result oriented, in a practice of work as creation and of cooperation, as a way of resistance to competition.

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- 6) It is a non-patriarchal and feminine form of interaction with the world, as a way of resistance to domination.
- 7) It enables gender to find its own forms of expression and to become the fundamental experience which shapes personalities, as a way of resistance to standardisation.
- 8) It is ruled by the principles of diversity and complementarity of activities and means of production, as a way of resistance to monoculture.

I will now examine these qualities in more detail because they give an idea of what we could practise, yet without giving up the potentials for more diversity our modern society can provide; once again it is about recomposing life-giving factors in a new way. The model describes an ideal towards which we can tend if we choose to, implementing our modern way in a more creative and conscious way than we do today.

1) Home economy

As there is no conversion into money, transformation is based on true needs and generates living human relationships in reciprocity.

Home production is oriented towards satisfying the needs of the people who live in, and are part of, the home community. Needs are therefore the true measure of what has to be “produced”, it means of what needs to be transformed in order to provide what is needed in the right form. The evaluation of economic value and the practice of speculation by market economy have no impact, because the value of each thing is determined by the direct need and possible use of it. The length of time spent to provide a given product or to repair a broken item has no special meaning because there is no criterion for time efficiency, although there is also a sense of scarcity of means to reach

the aims, which implies an appropriate and efficient use of these limited means, including also time.

Exchanges with exterior actors happen in order to satisfy the needs which cannot be answered at home. Exchanges inside the community generate relationships of reciprocal dependence between members. They are based on never ending exchanges which call for further exchanges because, each time someone provides a good or a service, there is the expectation that this value will be returned in a different way, maybe even to a third person. The dance never stops because economic activity generates ever more links between people while in market economy the payment comes to bring a conclusion to each exchange.

Home economy is based on value to be understood as a potential for use and satisfaction, more than something abstract that can be kept or reinvested. Wealth in this way is something which flows, is shared and remains partly common. Accessibility is the main rule, more than property. The commons are enriched by the contribution of all and provide the poorest with what is needed. This ability of the vernacular model to stimulate sharing and common wealth reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to appropriation.

As there is no conversion into money, there is no speculation on value, but only the use of what is needed. Value cannot be stored nor accumulated but only used.

Work is the energy of life applied to anything from cultivating the garden to rising the children or repairing the roof or singing a song. There is no distinction between shadow work and paid work. Every act is “productive”. Work focuses first on the most needed (food,

shelter) and extends into maintenance or improvements. Time is not the factor which regulates activities but the importance of what is needed becomes the decisive factor. It means it can take a lot of time to produce something which has little market value but is most needed; time is available for repairing tools or broken objects independently of their price.

Exchanges develop according to the pattern of reciprocity. Each exchange generates a debt of the receiver towards the provider as there is no conversion into money but only the expectation that the value will be returned. You help me repairing my house and I give you some wood or I teach your kids what I know. Or even the pattern involves more than two people: Paul helps John who helps Sarah who helps Paul. The value of these exchanges is not well defined because there is no objective measure; value is measured according to needs and these needs vary from one person to the next. There is no measure for the value of the exchanges, no precise standard and therefore no accounting. Exchanges generate more exchanges because they create the obligation to return an equal value. This is like walking when each step calls for the next to re-establish balance. The intensity of exchanges has to develop as something which is never finished because the right balance is never achieved. On the contrary market economy says: I pay you for your service and I do not owe you anything more; between us it is finished; I do not want to see you again; disappear! It is why the vernacular model is life giving, because it creates and reinforces social links, while market is basically not interested in relationships, but only in goods and money.

Goods, services, knowledge, work are not items but components of relationships, because the way we handle them defines either how we relate to the environment through our needs or how we relate to our

surroundings (resources and people) through our work and creativity, or because they are the opportunity to create links between people. Every resource is precious and needs its complement (work or link) to become usable and be shared.

Home economy implies the existence of a home community: this includes usually much more than the narrow family of parents and children; it is usually composed of the wider family, with grandparents, aunts and uncles, and includes also guests, helpers or workers and even a wide range of diverse people who are related for many different reasons such as heredity, stay, work, needs, protection, obligation, generosity.

2) Subsistence and needs

Subsistence is regulated by priorities of urgency in a wider range of needs (Chayanov), including subjective needs (recognition, love).

As we have seen, Chayanov's law says: the greater the ratio of workers to consumers in a household, the less each worker produces; production stops as needs are covered. And its corollary says: when subsistence is ensured, the community can consecrate itself to spiritual search: the intensity of production becomes maximum. Subsistence economy is not regulated by the theoretical value of what one can get on the market for the products one has but it is based on the use each person has of what is available, given the effort to transform resources into something suitable. All needs are therefore more or less considered from the most urgent to the most pleasurable. Material needs for surviving come first, but other human needs are also considered as soon as it is possible; it depends on the harshness of the environment, on the abundance of what is available and on how much effort is needed to transform local resources. Chayanov

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has described the adaptability of the workers to the pressure of needs. As soon basic needs are answered, one can relax and go into leisure mode.

What we call here “needs” designates all kinds of needs, not only basic material needs for survival, but also needs for social recognition, creative needs for expression, artistic taste for beauty, thirst for spiritual nourishment. Spontaneous self-limitation is in this sense the modulating awareness which allows people to choose what the priority is for them. There is no pressure to produce more than needed; the reason that it is possible to produce more than needed is not sufficient to incite people to do so. Nevertheless they remain free if they want to. Accumulation is not a value as such, except in the measure of necessity, as a basic security for inter-seasonal storage for example. This ability of the vernacular model to reassess constantly the consistency of needs reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to speculation.

Market economy is driven by production. If production is excessive, new market possibilities or new needs must be found or created in order to get rid of (i.e. sell) the excess of production. The possibility of producing more is sufficient to justify more production, even if there is no need for it, because profit is the regulating criterion. Vernacular economy is based on a very different logic grounded on the subjective interpretation of what is needed and on the limitation of resources and effort. It keeps everybody free to stop working when these needs are satisfied. This is an important aspect of the vernacular model which is too often discarded because vernacular societies do not seem to enjoy very often this privilege of freedom as they are often poor because they do not speculate and reality cannot be manipulated; they have to cope with their usually harsh environment and its limited means and tools, and with the lack of speculation

which would transfer (i.e. export) poverty to other external or marginal people or members.

The self-regulation of needs is a collective process which implies each one, because the interdependence is high. Each one needs the others in order to satisfy common and personal needs. The plenty of the whole community profits each one. This is a basic rule of common living we should better apply in our modern society. As we have shown, the field of the commons is often wide and rich because common property makes resources available for all.

3) Adaptability to natural laws

Adaptation to natural cycles and laws becomes a priority because survival depends on the care for, and respect of, the environment.

As the vernacular society is usually fragile and depends on the resources it can find in its own direct natural environment, the necessity to respect the laws of nature and to adapt to natural cycles becomes a condition for survival because these laws and cycles are regulating the health and maintenance of quality of the surroundings. The practice of ecology becomes the basic rule for everyday living. There is no room for destruction and attention must be given to the way natural cycles renew resources at a rhythm which cannot be speeded up for their consumption. Nuisances and scarcity cannot be exported, by lack of exchanges with the outside world and by lack of power provided by money. The vernacular society depends on very few “invisible slaves”, it means on very few people who provide necessary goods without being visibly involved inside the community itself. This ability of the vernacular model to stimulate adaptation to the natural laws of the universe reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to destruction.

Ecology is not only a technical science for the management of resources; it is much more; it is the practice of the harmonious relationship with the whole universe. Nature is only the visible aspect and expression of the laws which regulate the evolution of the cosmos. Any mature society (i.e. not our modern society!) knows that its adaptation to the laws of nature brings a form of harmony and wellbeing which are more than material. Harmony is the law of balance between all aspects of life, not only material ones. It is why the ability of the vernacular society to protect its own system of values and priorities is essential for its harmonious growth which includes also human, artistic, intellectual and spiritual dimensions and needs.

There is an important aspect of the vernacular society which should be considered seriously by our modern society: it is the fact that it does not export nuisances and keeps a clear visibility of the impacts of its action, on the natural surroundings as well as on the social network of its own body. Small is beautiful because it keeps everything at human scale, where each one can see what is at stake, without getting lost into complexity. This question of the right measure of complexity is a delicate challenge because it does not mean that we should remain poor by fear of complexity; it means that we have to keep control of our own growth because we want to remain empowered in our local community and we do not want exterior agents to dominate and control our life. Diversity is not excluded but it is, on the contrary, recognised as a source of richness; yet diversity also introduces external agents who can become dominant. It is why the issue of control of local development by the people who live locally remains essential. This means a capacity of the local community to manage external influences; it means a form of protectionism, controlled from inside the community, which is not

based on the fear of the other but nevertheless does not let external forces become dominant.

In developing exchanges and specialisation, our modern society has created a form of complexity which participates to hide the very large range of services which we depend on for our daily life. In fact many people work for us whom we do not know and we even ignore: the workers of the public services which provide us with power, security, education, health, or farmers and transporters who make our food available in the shopping centre, and so many other people who provide us with everything we consume or use. It is essential that we keep them in mind because their work is part of our ecological footprint. They are also a bit like slaves for us, as we are probably also for others in the same way. This notion of slave seems shocking but is very important because it makes visible what is not: through the power of money we pay for the work of these people, either through the price of their services, partly incorporated in goods, or through the channel of taxes, or even without any special involvement of money when voluntary work makes these qualities freely available. On the other hand, we enjoy also the free services of nature, provided by the natural cycles and seasons, by the power of the sun, the earth, the water and the air to transform and regenerate resources and make them available for answering our needs. In these natural and social or economic mechanisms, there is an important aspect of how we situate ourselves in relation to the natural and social context.

How much are we consuming? How many slaves do work for us? This dimension of our way of life is completely hidden, yet absolutely essential. It depends on our range of consumption, on the degree of our self-sufficiency, on the power that we use and that money provides us with. For how many slaves can we afford to pay?

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This gives the measure of our use of slavery. The term of slavery can seem inappropriate, because exchanges are perceived as a rich way to connect or establish human links and open oneself to diversity. Yet power plays a very important role in this process and our range of consumption depends on the power we dispose which is based on how much money we can afford to spend. Power in this way creates relationships which are not free but imposed because it becomes domination, no more free reciprocity. It is where the model of reciprocity in full visibility, that the vernacular model implements, becomes a very strong antidote against exploitation because it makes us aware of the degree of injustice and exploitation on which our way of life relies. How many slaves do you have? It is evident that the poor farmer in Burkina Faso has almost no slave, except when he can afford to buy sugar, while the rich American, European or Australian city dweller has many, probably a few hundreds (when cumulated in terms of working days).

The awareness of the importance of our relationship with nature, and the land we live on, is a fundamental aspect of the vernacular society. This model could transform our cities if we were to reintroduce agriculture in public spaces, in the form of community gardens. These gardens would be the opportunity for city dwellers to reconnect with the rhythm of seasons, with the cycles of production of resources and resorption of wastes. It could produce part of the food needed, it could absorb the wastes of composting toilets, alleviating in this way the whole network of sanitation and water treatment. And it would help inhabitants to re-appropriate themselves the urban space of streets, squares, parks, inner courtyards as a part of the commons in making them accessible to all for leisure time or work.

4) Self-limitation

Self-limitation can be imposed by the fragility of local nature; or it can be freely chosen as the best way to harmony and full life.

Chayanov's law and its corollary have an inevitable consequence if they have to be applied: the choice for self-limitation. When a way of life is based on needs, there is the necessity to decide which ones are the true needs, or more exactly what is the right priority between the different needs. Our market society abandons this choice to market forces; the key for choices is usually based on the comparison of prices; it means that we learn to make our choices in adapting to the reduced range of products offered on the market and in evaluating them according to a simplified measuring tool (price), instead of concentrating on our own needs (values). Chayanov's law and its consequences make evident the urgency for defining our own needs and priorities according to our own values and not to market trends. This is precisely the importance of self-limitation which does not respond to the major pressure of market forces but remains grounded on interior values (which have nothing to do with prices as we saw).

Anyway self-limitation can be imposed by the fragility and harshness of the surroundings; in this case there is no possibility for choice, except accepting the necessity of respecting the laws of nature. When self-limitation is not imposed by natural laws, it has to be triggered by needs which go beyond material comfort and belong to the intuitions of the deeper soul such as social link, creation, expression, recognition, spiritual search. In traditional societies, these needs are not clearly separated from other more material conditions; there is no clear distinction between mundane and spiritual needs, because they all form a whole, as a quality of relating with the world; it can be food, shelter, people, nature, God. All needs are part of a wider sacred relationship with what is. This ability of the vernacular model

to stimulate self-limitation reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to accumulation and waste.

Self-limitation is a very important aspect of the vernacular model because the choice for other priorities makes the material aspect of life less dominant, as this material dimension remains in balance with the satisfaction of other needs such as social link, artistic creation or spiritual growth. Such a society has a capacity to stop working in order to celebrate. The hunters-gatherers spent much less time working than we do today in our modern society where people can hardly make the ends meet although both parents are working more than full time. There is visibly something wrong in the way we give all our energy to a market economy which in fact is not able to answer what we call our essential needs.

When self-limitation is not harshly imposed by the natural environment, it can be freely chosen as a way of life for immaterial reasons. It seems today utopic to think that a community could choose to reduce its standard of life for spiritual reasons. Yet for instance (one example among many) in the 11th century a community in North Africa, called Ibadits, decided to withdraw into the desert in order to settle down far away from trade and caravans, and to live extremely simply in order to be capable to centre its spiritual life on prayer. They created the 5 towns of the M'zab Valley around Ghardaia (Algeria). What was possible at that time must still be possible today, if our evolution has truly generated progress. If not, it is urgently necessary to look clearly at what prevents us to make this kind of choice. Luckily many hermits or sannyasi are still here to show us that it is not only possible, but that it brings harmony and peace into our life. This is simply our own responsibility to choose and to act.

5) Never ending process

Transformation is more process oriented than result oriented; it is a never ending cycle which involves cooperation and creation.

Life is an ever changing process, not a frozen thing! A system focused on production is an aberration because it is regulated by the quantity of items it can shape which are sadly considered as the end results of human activity and creativity. Economic activities have indeed to be based on the fact that the flow of transformation never stops; everything is in the move and never stops changing, rising and disappearing; nothing lasts. Nature is based on eternal cycles of transformation; photosynthesis makes trees grow, but comes a day when the tree falls to the ground and starts decompose and goes back to humus. Our activities are similar; they are part of cycles of transformation; the product is never the end of the line; it is only an intermediary state in the process of transformation. The vernacular society has the wisdom to recognise this fact by integrating into natural cycles and in stimulating reciprocity between people as a never ending dance of exchanges which never finds its state of equilibrium. There is no false equation of a market price as compensation for a good. The intensity of the process is in the constant move.

Work is the energy as a whole, with its very practical aspects of effort and resistance of matter, yet also as a whole way of being creative in the satisfaction of needs or in relationships, in celebration, in caring. There is no decomposition of life into segments of paid work, shadow work, care for the family or leisure. The process integrates all actors in a form of cooperation, more than competition, because the limited means of the vernacular society make it necessary for all to participate. Of course each one must find their share and the whole

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process must also care for each one to be enriched. As the process is more important than the result, the quality of how it develops is essential. Actors have then to care more for this quality than for its efficiency. Work is also an opportunity for linking and not only product focused. This does not mean that the product is not important. Especially in a society with limited means, each effort counts and must be effective; but this effectiveness is global and not measured in terms of result or profit at the end of the process; it encompasses all aspects of the whole process, from the beginning to the end. This ability of the vernacular model to focus on the quality and on all aspects of the process reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to competition.

In Latin languages like French there is a distinction between work (*travail*) as an activity which answers needs and work (*oeuvre*) as a creation, as work of art. This distinction is significant because it shows how we have split our activities in different qualities. In fact the creative aspect of work remains even in an effortful attempt to dig a big hole. On the other hand, we have separated creative works from mundane ones as if it were the speciality of artists to produce beauty and meaning while we labour hard at making the ends meet. Art in this way has also lost its meaning by being separated from life. It becomes also a product, more than a process, which is sold for the best price and expresses the ego of the author more than the sensitivity of a community. Of course good art still exists but it has to fight the influences of market and to remain integrated in the flow of life. It is not only producing prettiness but has to delve with the deep issues of our being. Culture is not a special field of art production; it is the leading energy of how we live and the quest of what directs us. Culture is based on social link, on relationship with nature; this is a creative ever changing movement of life, and not a product we consume in museums, theatres or art galleries.

When the work process becomes total, it integrates all aspects of life. It is no more executed for the boss against remuneration. The whole logic of hierarchy on which production is based becomes shaken because the job does not define any more the person who does it. There is no more boss and executer. Especially when a work is done for one's own subsistence, it is free of this attached values of social status. It is where work can become creative again, as a work (*oeuvre*) of expression, even if it concerns mundane things, like emptying the composting toilet, when it becomes a gift to the family or group.

6) Feminine and anti-patriarchal

Femininity cares for all, emphasises quality of relationships at the cost of hierarchy and resists patriarchal models of domination.

Femininity is not only a question of gender; it is also another form of sensitiveness to the meaning of life. In this sense it is not so strongly linked with biological gender but more with culture in general or with personal attitudes and choices about life. To make it more easily distinct from gender it is maybe better to use the Chinese concepts of Yin and Yang. Yin is the feminine in terms of introvert, encompassing, caring, cooperative, by opposition to Yang as masculine, extravert, focusing, dominating, competing. Whatever our gender is, we combine, all of us, some Yin and Yang qualities; yet probably women combine more Yin and men more Yang qualities; even if they are not defined by gender, these qualities are nevertheless linked with the specific experience of gender; giving birth is not an insignificant experience! In what concerns the vernacular society this distinction between feminine and masculine attitudes is very important because in subsistence societies Yin values

find better conditions to become the main fostering energies. The perspective of subsistence is basically nourishing, which is evidently a feminine quality, a yin attitude and attention. In this way relationships become more important than hierarchy, care than domination, cooperation than competition.

This welcoming attitude is visibly a feminine quality which has been fostered and nourished by the experience of motherhood, and vernacular societies have kept this quality as they have kept their link with nature alive and are impregnated by the sense of protection and mothering it plays in life. These traditional societies see more the world as a network of links, as a constant process of adaptation and transformation than as a project focused on a precise aim. These feminine qualities generate the most beautiful attitudes, yet, in our modern society, they are generally overwritten by masculine values of competition, control and domination; because it is not dominant, this weaker feminine quality needs to be protected in order to thrive in a space where love and care, hospitality and patience are prevented from being repressed by our desires for power and domination, that we all have, women as well as men. This ability of the vernacular model to stimulate feminine values and attitudes reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to domination.

Our modern society is based on a patriarchal model. It does not mean only that it is dominated by people of the male gender; it means that it acts in preference according to masculine (Yang) values. I have described how the market is animated by forces of competition, greed, domination, control, speculation, accumulation, destruction. These can be characterised as Yang energies. And we know how much our society is organised according to principles of hierarchy which ensue out of the competing and dominating model. The principally feminine perception which governs the vernacular society

is a clear form of resistance to these male forms of domination. Matriarchal models see the world “bottom up”, it means from the point of view of average people who experience life in the everyday, and not from the point of view of autocrats who dominate the scene and become leaders more by means of power than by means of recognition of personal authority. The vernacular society is not seen as a hierarchical structure of domination but as a network of interdependence.

The following amazing true story¹⁶ can well illustrate the difference of logic between our modern understanding and the vernacular perception. Hillary Clinton, the wife of the American ex-president, travelled to Bangladesh to visit villages in order to evaluate the fruits of a small credit policy implemented by the Grameen Bank to allow rural women to become more independent (empowerment for women). The few young women who welcomed her showed her how they enjoyed having their own income; some even owned a cow or a few chooks. Quickly the dialogue reversed at the great surprise of the First Lady and these young women started asking her some more personal questions:

- Apa (which means something like “Respected Older Sister”, as Hillary is much older than them), do you have a cow?
- No, I do not.
- Apa, do you have an income?
- No, I had one, but since my husband is president I do not.
- Apa, how many children do you have?
- I have one daughter.
- Would you like to have more children?
- Yes, I would like to have one or two more, but it is not possible.

¹⁶ Summary of the version presented by: Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies: *The Subsistence Perspective – Beyond the Globalised Economy*. Zed Books, London, 1999.

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And these young women started whispering their impressions to one another: poor Hillary! she had no cow, no income and only one daughter! The First Lady seemed to them very unhappy and truly little empowered!

This story shows how the logic of subsistence, as it is perceived “bottom up”, based on the daily experience of necessity and basic economy, can powerfully challenge the hierarchical principles of patriarchy. It would be too simple to discard this point of view under the pretext that it is expressed by illiterate women. There is in this perception a powerful simplicity and freedom, and a great wisdom which reveals the illusion of our idea of wealth and power.

The main issue for our modern society is not the gender issue in terms of domination of the male over the female but the lack of protection for feminine values to develop freely. Of course we live in a patriarchal society based on masculine values and women play evidently a role which is not fully recognised. In this way our society loses an extremely rich wealth because it does not allow women (half of the population!) to express fully their femininity. It seems, on the opposite, that women are allowed to practise influent roles only if they accept to play the masculine card, i.e. to adapt to masculine patterns of behaviour. Luckily there are still many women who remain faithful to their own feminine identity and try to find their own ways of expression.

I believe that feminism has not succeeded in identifying the true reasons why women are prevented from influencing the evolution of our society in a way which would be as powerful as the way men do. The true explanation is for me that the influence of femininity seems to be recessive, as they would say in biology. Masculinity (Yang)

seems to be a dominant character and femininity (Yin) a recessive one, as brown eyes are a dominant and blue eyes a recessive character; when dominant and recessive characters combine, the dominant imposes itself and the recessive does not appear, although it is still fully there in the genes. If we observe the nature of the values of our society, we can notice how much they are of the masculine type (Yang): youth, speed, wealth, action, competition, power, domination, control. When they are free to dominate, these values overwrite the more feminine attitudes (Yin) such as the ability of welcoming evolution and ageing naturally, of taking time, or such as simplicity, observation, cooperation, service, collaboration, adaptation, which are the antithetic energies of what we have described for masculinity. These feminine values seem to be recessive in the way that they can express themselves only if space and protection allow them to; this quality of protection for the expression of recessive values is what a mature society would ensure, in order for these qualities to be able to provide the necessary nurturing conditions for life, even if they do not impose themselves by their own power; a privileged space must be protected for love, tenderness, hospitality, care, service, quality of being, and similar values, to be able to express themselves.

Now the problem is in our modern society that we are completely focused on these masculine values (Yang) which in summary mean power, accumulation and exploitation, leaving no more space for the feminine nurturing qualities (Yin) to be experienced. Because of our tendency to accept masculine domination as a necessary constraint to become wealthy, we have lost the values of compassion, of welcoming, of care. And this is not a question of oppression of one gender by the other, but a question of letting masculine behaviours overwrite feminine attitudes; most people behave according to these masculine values, independently of their gender; women do too; they

enjoy travelling quickly to Turkey for a week of holidays, then having money to buy any item, preferring having a big swimming pool, a powerful car, not being bothered by the neighbour who is in need, being happy when the kids watch TV because there is no need to care for them. How could a more compassionate society take shape if nobody practises compassion, except a minority, who are not even especially women?

7) The unisex issue

Our trade system has uniformed our ways of being, disconnecting them from our own personality which is linked with our gender.

Another essential aspect concerning the gender role in vernacular societies is the fact that there is no unisex procedure as there is in our modern world. As Ivan Illich says, when I see a silhouette on the horizon in the Andes, I know whether it is a man or a woman because of the work the person is doing. It means that there is a clear distinction of gender throughout all types of work of vernacular economy, because the experience of gender influences the shaping of personality and makes people who they are. In other words it means that the experience of gender is basically an essential component of our person, which our modern way of life has ever more uniformed and has tendency to deny. In becoming interchangeable, all of us, women and men, we become like the robots of a production chain.

The affirmation that genders should make a difference in the way we practise work seems very sexist and seems to mean an oppression of women by the patriarchal system, but in fact it is the expression of our diversity of personalities and gifts which gets squashed in the name of productivity. And this force, which destroys our own personality and our possibilities for expression linked with our

gender or uniqueness, is certainly another aspect of the illusion of emancipation for women when they have to mimic masculine attitudes in order to perform. This ability of the vernacular model to protect and enhance the respective qualities of gender reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to standardisation.

At this stage it is important to establish a few clear distinctions. A few main considerations concerning gender issues seem to me to be important:

- The first point is that the vernacular way of life includes all possible activities in an extremely varied diversity, from farming to building, from raising the children to celebrating marriages, from repairing the tractor (when they have one) to felling wood; and the list never finishes. This means that this extremely wide range of activities requires a vast range of diverse skills from the same few people in charge. The vernacular worker is in fact a generalist who knows a little bit about everything. In this sense it is evident that there is to be some form of specialisation, even if reduced to a minimum, because no one is capable to face alone the total complexity and especially the simultaneous pressure of so many different types of factors; it means that each member has spontaneously the tendency to take on oneself the responsibility for, and become specialised in, some defined types of works, and this specialisation will in general almost automatically happen according to gender. This does not mean that one gender (he) will never contribute to the specialised field of the other (she); it means only that the former will remain free to cope with other responsibilities while the latter will be responsible for her own field of competence. The specialisation will happen according to gender because intuitively each gender will know what he or she is good at.

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- When one observes this form of specialisation in more detail, one recognises the specificity of each gender. Women have been giving birth for millennia; it is an undeniable fact that they are much better at it than men! Nature itself has created this fundamental distinction. By consequence it is normal that a mother has more instinct to protect her little ones, and by extension her own flock, than a man would have, despite the ability of each one to learn new behaviours. In traditional couples the man has more a role to protect and to structure the frame of life of his family, while the mother has more the role of nourishing the members of the family; nourishing can mean feeding with food as it can signify also opening their spirit to the deep meaning of life. Deep biological differences have impact on our behaviour; it does not mean that it is the only factor that plays a role; yet it is important we remain true to our biological and spiritual nature.
- As I expressed it already many times, different works do not have different respective social statuses as long as they are done for the sake of necessity and not shaped by a social way of interpreting them as images of social status. The hierarchy of jobs we have adopted in our modern society has arisen from the way we learned to look at them in terms of prestige and not from the intrinsic nature of the jobs themselves and their real utility. By contrast the vernacular society is in principle free from these patterns. Each one does what he or she has to do, without comparing it with what the others do. The work in the garden is often the responsibility of the woman because it remains in the proximity of the house and it fits also well with the responsibility of the children, with the processing of products in the kitchen and with the work of nourishment in its wider sense, with the more introvert work women do. The work in the fields is more adapted for the man, because it relays on more physical strength and on a more extroverted constitution. Nevertheless, when there is a lot to do (harvest, storm), all join into the same type of work, including the children. In this model nobody can say that one type of work is superior to the other and provides one person with power over the other. There is no such distinction, as it is the case in our modern society, between shadow work at home (hidden and disvalued) and paid work as professional (rewarded and estimated). This distinction is a pure creation of our own, under the influence of our market system. In our modern logic, outer work is valued because it is paid; this means that selling one's own workforce is better than caring for one's children; this is a non-sense! The value is here imposed from outside without consideration for the necessity of the different jobs and the true value of their contribution.
- Many forms of oppression exist in traditional societies, but they do not ensue out of work conditions or because of the nature of the work done. Yet the contrary will happen: the best tasks will be reserved to men and hard work will be given to women. This happens because there is already in place an unjust structure which does not respect all members of the family in an equal way. Slavery is a social system which is not defined by the type of work but by the social power of the dominating members and by the will to exploit. Traditions and myths will inevitably come and reinforce this form of domination.
- In our modern urban society, there is a unisex pattern. People refuse that the gender defines a better ability for certain types of activities because we live no more under the influence of nature and we are highly specialised. Specialisation does not ensue out of the extreme variety of tasks, as in the vernacular model, but out of the specialisation of our trade system. Activities are no more linked with our gender capacities because we are ever more trained, women and men, in an identical way, in order to fulfil the

requirements of jobs which become ever more undifferentiated; on one hand there is a trend to specialisation for high skill jobs, and on the other hand, for the majority of workers, the production system has reduced our creativity to nothing in a simple production of identic items. In both cases we are trained for unisex jobs. People are trained principally for playing a role, as a cog, in an economic system, and not for expressing their personal skills, depending on their gender, culture, experience, personality. Doctors, lawyers, architects are trained in the same way, whether they are men or women; and I cannot believe that women practise medicine or architecture in the same way as men do. Jobs have been made poorer because they have lost their gender component; they have been reduced to a function. And this form of devaluation by impoverishment is very different from the other form of devaluation that happens according to a hierarchy of false prestige, based on exploitation, i.e. on the gender that dominantly practises these different jobs! It means that our diversity of personalities and skills gets lost into a uniform chain of production where skills are undifferentiated and gender does not play anymore a role because it becomes irrelevant as our personality or uniqueness does too. Yet it would be foolish to deny gender differences. It remains evident that women continue to give birth and that this very special experience fosters their abilities and attitudes about life. This has inevitably to play a fundamental role in the shaping of the personality, in the development of special personal gifts and skills, in the way one looks at the world, and finally in the choice of activity and the way to practise it. What is essential is how to avoid that what we can call feminine activities should be taxed differently because they are practised more by women. Now, on the opposite, it is very rich that anybody can choose any possible job, independently of their gender. There is objectively no obstacle for

a woman to drive a truck or for a man to work in child care. We have yet to remain aware that the unisex issue is created artificially by a modern world which has detached from nature because comfort, market and money have interfered and made poorer the diverse ways of expressing one's own personality and of pursuing one's own vocation. It means that this artificial way of life can lead us far away from our true nature and way of being. Freedom is not simply the possibility to choose whatever pleases us; it is also the challenge to find a form of expression which is faithful to our true nature. False freedom can incite us to deny what we are; this is a danger which has to be considered as much as the conservative model of feminine and masculine jobs. The true question is: what is true to me?

These few points show, in my opinion, that the vernacular model emphasises a major problem of our undifferentiated repetitive production jobs and of our unisex society when both gender and personality lose their own traits and forms of creativity. As a male, should I ask: when will I be able to give birth, in the name of equality? Absurd question, of course! As if I would like to fly to become equal to birds!

A last point about the role of femininity in vernacular context: it is important to grasp that the vernacular way, because of its feminine strength, is a deeply human way of restoring justice and equity, care for the weak and respect for all; it is based on a spirit of cooperation which means hospitality, care, flexibility, adaptation, no non-sense. This feminine (Yin) mentality emphasises by contrast how dominating and violent our modern world has become with its undercurrent violence. The vernacular way is deeply another way of looking at the same world. Is it not an inspiring challenge for our own necessary mutation? Remember, we talk about the model!

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Practice is certainly more difficult. Yet, before we start implementing new ways of being together, we have to choose the right model of inspiration!

8) Diversity and complementarity of activities

The tendency not to specialise but to produce most necessities generates a very wide range of activities; diversity means stability.

Our modern society has specialised because technological development has allowed abundance which means excesses to be sold. In concentrating on a more reduced and specialised field, production can increase and profit does too. Yet the vernacular society does not have this possibility for specialisation because the members are not numerous enough and the urgency of basic needs has forced them to concentrate first on urgencies. This is the tendency of our modern society not only to specialise on the most prolific fields of activities but also to delegate subaltern tasks to poorer categories of workers, whether by exploiting poorer social classes or by dislocating production. In marginal places of richer countries, it becomes more and more evident how specialisation has generated poverty; traditional trades have disappeared because they have been replaced by trade of ready-made items from China. This means a terrible impoverishment because young people are deprived of learning the skills of these varied jobs that get lost. They have only the possibility to work in retail services which are usually some big corporations with sterile and anonymous work conditions.

On the opposite the vernacular model favours the practice of as many different trades as possible. These trades are generally more basic and their range is narrower than in an industrial society, but they usually cover nevertheless the basic needs of everyday living and are very

understandable and visible because they concern the aspects of life everyone knows. Apprenticeship can happen locally because all trades are still represented and it is part of the function of the social network to train youngsters in the field of their choice (when they can have the privilege to choose!). This important diversity contrasts with the uniformity of our trade society where activities concentrate more and more on resale and services that are more abstract or even virtual trades. Diversity is evidently an important factor for complementarity and stability of future evolution. Very often diversity of trades cohabits with social diversity and diversity of languages and with biodiversity. Diversity is usually the fruit of natural growth; our needs are highly diversified and they can only be answered without the use of any special financial power (access to cash) if these services remain accessible locally; it means if they are still practised locally. The rule of economic efficiency seems to go against this law of basic satisfaction of needs which is also a condition for local employment and deepening of culture. Trades are probably an important contribution to the way a given community relates to its natural and social surroundings. This ability of the vernacular model to stimulate diversity and complementarity reinforces the strength of the community in a form of resistance to monoculture and to colonisation.

Diversity generates life. When measures are implemented locally in order to protect or develop diversity, the opportunity to live locally and to find satisfaction in the opportunities offered locally will increase. This is in a few words what the vernacular model challenges us to do.

Diversity allows local exchanges and stimulates the circulation of goods and services, and the local wealth remains local, in terms of money but especially in terms of know-how, of social link and

possibly also in terms of care. On the opposite, big corporations have the tendency to export wealth to their own centre of power.

Diversity and size are narrowly connected. In a small workshop or corporation, each worker has a more diversified mission which means more varied tasks, and a more visible influence, which generates better recognition. In a small workshop each worker sees what he has produced. For these reasons there is today a tendency in some workshops which produce complex items such as cars to remain small and diversified.

Diversity increases the relative self-sufficiency of local economy. It is a resistance to the domination by external actors. It generates wealth, or more precisely the wealth which is needed for satisfying local needs, more than the wealth of accumulation which specialisation would probably make easier, at the cost of other qualities.

Diversity enriches also the commons, because a wider local knowledge becomes available locally and can be made more easily accessible. Life (daily experience) and learning (training) mingle.

Diversity enriches local collective awareness, especially when the members of the local community meet, share their knowledge and try to shape together their common future by agreeing on a form of consensus of what should be done. Diversity in this way makes the exercise more difficult because the diversity of points of view is stronger but this same diversity will widen the range of the spectrum and allow a deeper and more complete view of reality. The resulting consensus will be more elaborate and more grounded in life, especially if the consensus is not just the creation by a few intellectuals but remains in touch with the material reality of

craftsmanship and intense relationship with nature through sustainable agriculture.

Diversity can be also a means for equality because it provides more possibilities, if there is a care to make these possibilities accessible for all. Equality generates peace and good conditions of life.

And diversity is the mother of gratitude because it makes life wider.

Redistribution, LETS, gift and reciprocity

I just described the patterns of the traditional vernacular society as a model which could inspire and guide the change in our modern society towards a form of economy which would answer our true human needs more than just allow us to accumulate goods and money. This model outlines the main trends which are important for implementing a more equal balance between the different needs of our human nature, from the most material to the most spiritual, and a better standard of life in general for all people. As a complement to this approach it is important to see that even in our own modern society many attempts try already to propose a true answer to the questions linked with the issues of subsistence and distribution of wealth. It is worth examining a few of them because they illustrate pretty well what can be done in a realistic and practical way.

The 4 main social options

Four social options to bring more equality can be described: redistribution, non-monetary exchanges, gift's relationship, reciprocity.

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These four main social options, as forms of control of economic forces by social awareness, can be described as follows. They are called social option because they rely on a decision of the social group to act in one of the following ways:

- 1) Redistribution: this option starts from the acknowledgement that money has in any case the tendency to accumulate and that, even if money is the means for accumulation and inequality, it is also therefore the best means for the redistribution of wealth and correction of the inequity it has created. Money, when it is used with the awareness and clear intention of bringing more justice and relief of suffering in the world, can be used in the form of small credits, of loans, of subsidies, of donations, in order to make possible what poverty, understood as a lack of money, prevents.*
- 2) Non-monetary exchanges: they are very frequent in our daily life, inside the family, in the neighbourhood, in voluntary work. Yet this is not here the major aspect of non-monetary exchanges. In many countries the practice of social money is widespread; social money is a currency which is created artificially by a delimited community; this currency has no value as such and cannot be exchanged for real official money; it serves only the purpose of accounting (compensating) for the amount of work or goods which are exchanged inside the given community. In this way it stimulates exchanges and offers work possibilities even when there is no cash available.*
- 3) Gift's relationship: this is a practice in traditional societies where generous gifts are used to accompany all kinds of exchanges. These gift exchanges constitute a form of delayed barter as the gifts have to be returned. The only constraint to do so ensues out of a moral obligation and the belief that the spirit of the gift cannot be owned but has to circulate.*

- 4) Reciprocity: this practice is more often the fact of traditional societies. Nevertheless it can inspire our own practice because it also takes place in our modern society; it consists in exchanges based on generosity or necessity without financial or accounted counterpart but the moral obligation to return a similar value to the giver or to a third person. It differs from the precedent one by the fact it is much wider than an exchange of gifts because it concerns all aspects of life: goods, work, assistance, celebration.*

Marx in his early writings¹⁷ (he was only 26 in 1844), describes two different ways of relating to production and exchanges. These two descriptions make more evident why the way of reciprocity offers a much richer and deeper relationship with one's own work or with others than a mere market approach does.

The first description concerns the market approach:

“When I produce more of an object than I myself can directly use, my surplus production is cunningly *calculated* for your need. It is only in *appearance* that I produce a surplus of this object. In reality I produce a *different* object, the object of your production, which I intend to exchange against this surplus, an exchange which in my mind I have already completed. The *social* relation in which I stand to you, my labour for your need, is therefore also a mere *semblance*, and our complementing each other is likewise a mere *semblance*, the basis of which is mutual plundering. The intention of *plundering*, of *deception*, is necessarily present in the background, for since our exchange is a selfish one, on your side as on mine, and since the selfishness of each seeks to get the better of that of the other, we necessarily seek to deceive each other. It is true though, that the

¹⁷ Karl Marx: *Manuscript of 1844*.

power which I attribute to my object over yours requires your *recognition* in order to become a real power. Our mutual recognition of the respective powers of our objects, however, is a struggle, and in a struggle the victor is the one who has more energy, force, insight, or adroitness. If I have sufficient physical force, I plunder you directly. If physical force cannot be used, we try to impose on each other by bluff, and the more adroit overreaches the other. For the *totality* of the relationship, it is a matter of chance who overreaches whom. The *ideal*, *intended* overreaching takes place on both sides, i.e. each in his own judgement has overreached the other. (...)

1) Each of us actually *behaves* in the way he is regarded by the other. You have actually made yourself the means, the instrument, the producer of *your* own object in order to gain possession of mine.

2) Your own object is for you only the *sensuously perceptible covering*, the *hidden shape*, of my object; for its production *signifies* and seeks to *express* the *acquisition* of my object. In fact, therefore, you have become for yourself a *means*, an *instrument* of your object, of which your desire is the *servant*, and you have performed menial services in order that the object shall never again do a favour to your desire. If then our mutual thralldom to the object of the beginning of the process is now seen to be in reality the relationship between *master* and *slave*, that is merely the *crude* and *frank* expression of our *essential* relationship.

Our *mutual* value is for us the *value* of our mutual objects. Hence for us man himself is mutually of *no value*."

This description can seem very extreme; yet it uncovers how material goods can possess us. And now the second description, which is the

continuation of the same text, concerns the richer relationship of reciprocity where work is done for satisfying the need of the other:

"Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person.

1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character* and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective*, *visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*.

2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's* essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man's* essential nature.

3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love.

4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal nature*.

Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature."

We see clearly in this second description how the act of creation becomes an expression of human essential nature and how it creates a

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link between two persons who respect and recognise each other in a relationship of human compassion.

These two texts show pretty well the contrast between the two attitudes. I have affirmed earlier the urgency of a radical change in our economic system for reasons of mere survival. In these two descriptions Marx shows how we can act as human beings, fully aware of our true nature. If this need for this possible awareness is not an urgency for our physical survival, it is nevertheless urgently needed because it is our human dignity which is at stake. And so many human beings die of humiliation, exploitation or by mere lack of respect. If they do not die physically, they die nevertheless in their deeper being.

The four social options we have described are precisely meant to allow this qualitative change in our economic relationships. Let's see now what these four main options are in more detail, through more practical considerations.

1) Redistribution

When people use money to bring more equity and justice, and offer more opportunities for all, money can become this good tool.

Money is a neutral tool and has no power as such. Earlier we have shown how its real power is based indeed on the value we project onto it and on the trust we have in it to provide us with what we need or what we dream of. Without this power that, as a global human community, we have created, money would be nothing else than a mere heap of sand. Yet this power, as long as people believe in it, becomes real and starts dominating all relationships, especially because we believe that money is so important for our wellbeing. The

belief becomes fact and the fact proof of the belief. Because of this belief, money becomes essential; in fact without money we cannot access the necessary goods. The power we have created artificially so long ago becomes now the dominating power in our life, especially because it is manipulated by a minority of privileged richer people to extract more wealth from others; and we have now to submit to it, to such a point that it creates tragedy in so many lives. Yet the contrary is also true: with money we can act according to our own ideals of equity and generosity although we have also to respect the main laws of economy in doing so. We can use money to create more justice, to repair the harm that economic and social crudeness has generated. If we are privileged enough to have freedom of choice about certain amounts of money which are at our disposition, we can decide how to use it in the best creative way, it means without succumbing to the normal pressure or trend of thirst for profit.

There are many practices we can describe here summarily.

Small credits: As I have described it earlier, Peace Nobel Price Muhammad Yunus has created the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Its purpose is to provide poor people with small credit possibilities which will allow them to invest in a small project or a minor improvement that will impact on their quality of life and alleviate their poverty. These possibilities are mainly offered to women in order to empower them in a social context that tends to exploit them and also because the experience has demonstrated that women are more reliable for investing these small credits in the proper way and paying them back. Some women for instance buy a cow or a loom or a water foot pump which will allow them to produce something they can use for their family or for sale. The remarkable aspect of these small credits is that they are repaid by these poorer people in a much

more important proportion than average credits in the banking system in general. Trust generates trust and self-esteem.

Economia I Communione: Chiara Lubich has founded the movement Focolari in Italy during WW2 as a Christian community whose practice was based on shared ownership according to the model of early Christian communities. After the war, she extended the practice of this spirit of sharing into a form of corporations whose activity was not to be based on the logic of profit but on the practice of redistribution of the wealth that economic activity would make available, because profit can remain effective, without being the leading priority, and be reoriented towards equity or poverty alleviation. Chiara Lubich used to say that our usual economic practices are based on the principle of having but that her project was based on the principle of giving, because giving is a fundamental tendency of human being and therefore economic activity has to integrate this aptitude and vocation (or even basic need) as a major factor of our human expression. The activity of this new type of corporation was based on three aims:

- 1) Help people in financial need,
- 2) Shape a culture of the practice of giving.
- 3) Implement a new spirit for corporations, based on respect of persons, ecology and equity.

These other conditions transform completely the spirit of these corporations although they would not appear to be very different in their outlook, except that decisions would be taken in a very different way, with fundamentally different effects that would radically transform work conditions and the impact of their activities. This example shows how the social option can transform our world because it ensures that our activities are led by ethical principles and spiritual values. Work becomes an experience and expression of life,

despite the fact that it takes shape in the wider conventional economic context

Cicadas: Everybody knows the Esop's fable of the Cicada and the Ant. The name "Cicada" has been chosen by a French alternative movement (Cigale = Club d'Investisseurs pour une Gestion Alternative et Locale de l'Epargne) as a wink against the spirit of the fable inasmuch as these clubs of investors intend to practise a light relationship with money, understood as a means to offer possibilities of expression for all members of the community. These clubs of investors use to bring together small investors and people with projects that need funding. The main purpose for the investors is to meet interesting people, participate in creative adventures and enrich their own life rather than to make more money; they use the small funds they own to support creative initiatives. Very often the investment does not bring any return or even gets lost, but the creativity of the exchanges seems to them much more rewarding than any gain. On the other hand they offer the possibility for people with imagination and larger views to implement their project. In most cases these projects have themselves also a social purpose and content and intend to improve the quality of social relationships or the way of life of disadvantaged people. These exchanges between investors and contractors are also the opportunity to share knowledge as the investors become also counsellors and participants in the design and management of these activities that need a lot of imagination and free thinking as they are usually not conventional.

Tontines: This is the name given in West Africa for a system of credit based on the following practice: the necessary amount is collected by the members of an association who contribute each one to a common fund according to their possibilities; this collection will provide the necessary means for investment in the project of one of

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the members; members take turn in financing or being financed by the fund. These are evidently very small amounts, given usually the poor context in which it is practised, but nevertheless an understanding of common interest and interdependence succeeds to accumulate in this way the minimum necessary means, when people understand that cooperation and common effort provide better effects than individualism and competition. Evidently the contributions are motivated also by generosity because the opportunity to enjoy support is much rarer than the effort of contribution, although globally the amounts each one would enjoy or contribute should be roughly equal on the long term. There is also in the principle of the system itself a great freedom to manage the common fund according to a more or less strict accounting rigor, which would leave more or less space for generosity or on the contrary calculate each contribution and interest in a very rigorous way. In principle credits do not need to be paid back, because they get paid up-front; nevertheless paying them back would allow the fund to be more quickly refurbished, it means more efficient in its function. Credits can be in the form of money, work, knowledge. The basic principle of common effort in the interest of one member is a basic practice of traditional societies, because of the fragility of their means and the harshness of life conditions. The system of tontine has only formalised this practice in a process which becomes clearer and stimulates the courage of concerned members.

In the four examples I have just described above, it appears that a few characteristics are fundamental for what I have called the social option:

- The leading vectors of social option are essentially ethic and spiritual choices and priorities. These choices are made by people

according to their own perception of life, and not according to economic efficiency.

- It is essential that the social option remains in control of the project because it is the only way the process can develop. Without social awareness it would collapse, i.e. degenerate into competition and struggle of interest, into oppression of the one by the other.
- Numerous are the practices in our families, neighbourhood or communities which respect these rules of predominance of human priorities to control economic mechanisms.

2) Non-monetary exchanges - LETS

A social currency is a way of accounting for exchanges without money so that people without cash can be involved in economic life.

As I explained shortly earlier, social money is a currency which is created artificially by a delimited community; this currency has no value as such and cannot be exchanged for real official money; it serves only the purpose of accounting (compensating) for the amount of work or goods that are exchanged by the members. In this way it stimulates exchanges even when there is no cash available. People without cash can access a form of work which will not be paid in cash but accounted as a value that they can use to buy goods or benefice for themselves services (i.e. work) provided by other members of the same community. This means is very powerful for alleviating poverty and for giving a new dignity to unemployed people because it breaks the character of exclusion created by money. In our market system one can access the goods and services offered on the market only if one has money and can pay for these goods or services; and people without cash are completely excluded from the system of exchanges. Social currency has the great advantage of

permitting people without cash to be involved. Even if they have no positive amount on their account, they are able to buy because the system is based on a form of almost unlimited credit which is controlled by the main managers and by the whole network; this form of exchanges have indeed to be managed by the whole community. The whole system is based on the practice of honesty, on trust and on the fact that each member is known personally and cares for his or her own image in the group.

In Anglo-Saxon countries this system is called LETS, for Local Employment and Trading System. The currency is called any name which can have a local significance. The value of the social currency unit is usually equal to the value of the official national currency so that the social currency has a clear significance as value for everybody; for instance 1 lets = 1 \$ or 1 Euro. As each participant has his own account where each credit (income) and each debit (expense) is recorded, a central administration office (or software) is in charge of keeping the accounting up-to-date for all members. Even if a software can calculate the balances resulting of all exchanges, an inquisitive eye is necessary to detect abuses or miss functioning. Each member can spend money even if his or her account is below zero; in fact there is always as much money in positive (credit) as in negative (debt); the sum of the balances of all the accounts is always zero, because each credit is compensated by a debit of the same value and the total amount involved therefore never changes. This demonstrates in a very practical way that wealth cannot be created; it can only circulate or be unevenly distributed. In the case of social money there is no meaning in accumulating it because it has no value as such but it is made to be used (spent).

John is a horticulturist and an art painter in his leisure time. Peter is a mechanic. Anne has a garden where she cultivates vegetables and

practises massage as an amateur. They are members of the same network. John can prune Anne's trees (for 30 lets), and Anne can sell him a few salads (5 lets). Peter can repair John's car (60 lets). Anne can take painting lessons with John (20 lets) and give massage sessions to Peter (50 lets). They all start with their account at zero, and no one can afford to spend cash because they have used their available cash in the official currency for their fix living costs. After these first exchanges in lets, John has in his account a debt of 15 lets (+30-5-60+20), Anne has a credit of 5 lets (-30+5-20+50), Peter has a credit of 10 lets (+60-50), the total of all available funds is truly zero. This constant common value at zero shows that exchanges, if they cannot create wealth, can nevertheless stimulate economic activities; money has no value, as we saw it, except the power to stimulate exchanges, even when people have no cash.

One could argue that a dishonest person could have in this way his house built without producing any counter-value. It is true that the system does not prevent this possible form of excesses because it is based on trust and respect of others. Yet in such a network everybody knows everybody and the respect of each one is based on how he or she respects the rules and behaves in a generous way. Dishonesty would immediately be detected and the person ostracised. The experience shows indeed that people have the tendency to underestimate the value of what they propose; this is probably also the case because the "market" in such a network is much narrower; it means there are less potential clients; but it is also due to the fact that people highly value the quality of their relationships because the quality of these links constitutes the bone of the network. In any case the security of such a system is probably superior to the one of our bank system which experiences serious losses in each case of bankruptcy. In a social network, if there is an excess or someone is cheating, the loss is insignificant because the work which has been

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done has generated a real income and is rewarded in any case; this is not the case for bankruptcy in the bank system, when creditors cannot be paid by lack of money caused by the loss of the debtor.

For instance this system of social currency has been much used in Argentina in slums where people have no cash but have a lot of skills which are maybe not of professional quality but are sufficient to provide good services. Such people can start a small business in getting paid in lets; they have also some minimal purchasing power as it is not necessary to have a credit on one's account to be able to spend some lets, it means to acquire goods or services from other members. This is also for poor people the way to get new skills in being trained by another member against a small "investment" in lets which can be repaid as soon as the training provides trade's possibilities. In this case there is no interest rate, and no real debt but only the moral obligation to return the value of the debit.

The currency unit refers usually to a monetary currency (for instance lets, which are similar to dollars, euros). It would be indeed more powerful to be more daring and to have each unit equal to an hour of work for the following reasons:

- As I have showed, every resource is free because it is provided freely by nature or by the social context, except for the work to make it available, it means for the cost of subsistence, for the worker to have the time to transform the resource into the right form that makes it usable. It means that the price of goods should be due only to work and to nothing else, whether in the form of embedded previous work or of new work to make the good available. And work (or subsistence) is a duration (in hours).
- Everybody has approximately similar needs and therefore has to earn a similar income to cover similar basic needs (subsistence),

which are linked with duration, i.e. the global time of subsistence while the person is working to earn his or her subsistence.

- All works are not of equal quality but the people who can provide better quality can do that because they have received more gifts, whether these gifts are natural gifts at birth or acquired skills provided by the social milieu, special education or training or just privileged conditions of life. Whatever are the conditions and the gifts, time should be rewarded in equal ways for all, because only time matters and special quality is always given and should not have influence on the price. This is a very challenging truth!
- The price of goods and services can be calculated according to the time embedded in them (work provided in the past to make the resource available) or to the time necessary in the present for transforming them into a form that makes them usable or available at the right place and time.

These few reasons mean that people, in a lets system based on time only, would exchange their availability more than material goods. Skills are the true reason for the exchanges but not the measure for the price. Evidently this rule creates fundamentally new conditions for work which becomes really a gift to the community and is nevertheless rewarded in a way which allows each one to make their skills available to all. This quality of exchanges should be the basic purpose of any economic system. Such a system is sustainable and prevents any form of speculation. People earn what they need for their living but do not accumulate; wealth circulates as quickly as possible and reaches many more people. Equality is guaranteed and everybody has a share of the common wealth. Each person is estimated and respected for what he or she has provided. More generous people get more respect and love. Everything in this logic would be in place to stimulate positive behaviours and allow anybody to develop their best aptitudes.

As such a network has to integrate into a wider economic system, it is important that part of these exchanges can be paid for in the official currency, especially if industrial products that have to be bought are needed for the work. The wider the diversity of skills offered inside the network, the wider the network can cover its own needs in using only the social currency. It is evidently easier to find people ready to mow your lawn for a few lets than a skilled doctor, because the activity of the latter involves on one hand more components which are related to the wider economic context, and on the other hand also an inflated prestigious representative image of oneself that such an alternative practice could participate to reduce. Yet one could imagine a doctor providing cares for parts of lets and part of official currency, making his care more available for people without or with little cash.

The negative aspect of the system is also its advantage: the lack of choice (and competition) between clients and between actors, because of the reduced size of the network, forces people to adapt to the given conditions; prices remain low, wealth circulate quicker, wealth remains local because it has to be used locally, which stimulates more local exchanges and more local sharing of goods, services and knowledge. This is the contrary of what happens at the supermarket which will use the cash paid by the client to pay for work in China; such a lost wealth will never return locally.

3) Gift's relationship

Gifts are a form of delayed barter whose conditions have not been negotiated but rely on the obligation of giving back the value.

In traditional societies the custom of spontaneous and generous gifts that accompany any meeting or agreement creates for the receiver a moral obligation to give back the same or increased value to the donor. Despite their appearance, gifts can be a way to impose a form of domination disguised in generosity. They can create a form of competition in an apparent form of detachment that is necessarily based on wealth or at least on the abundant availability of what is given. Contracts of diverse types, such as peace treaties, alliances or marriages, are usually sealed by the exchange of an abundance of gifts. On the West coast of Canada Chinook Indians use to organise ceremonies called potlatches (that means “feed and consume”) which consist in large feasts where a huge quantity of goods is given freely to be consumed or destroyed in order to impress the guests and impose one's own power. The receivers are obliged to later return the same form of prodigality even with increased value. Although it is presented as a gift, it is in fact a form of forced exchange which creates a power relationship. This is of course an extreme practice where generosity is not the true motivation.

In a more balanced way traditional societies practise the exchange of gifts as a delayed form of barter; the exchange is not immediate and the terms are not fixed beforehand; the receiver is free to return the gift in the way he or she wishes but the moral obligation nevertheless remains strong. What is interesting in this practice is the fact that the good is only a pretext to create links. What counts most is the spirit of the gift, or more exactly something of the giver, which impregnates the exchange and the time. The gift is more than the object; it is the support for the presence of the other.

In Polynesia one finds the same practice of gifts as the *potlatch* but without the aspect of excess. As the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss notices it, gifts create this same obligation of giving in return.

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For the Maoris the gift is not inert because it contains something of the giver. This is a fundamental aspect of the gift; it remains impregnated by the giver. Mauss¹⁸ quotes R. Elston Best:

“I will tell you about the *hau*. Suppose that you own a precise item (*taonga*) and that you give this item to me; you give it without fixed price. We do not bargain about it. Later I give this same item to a third person who, after a while, decides to give back something as payment (*ulu*), and he gives me another item as a present (*taonga*). This *taonga* that he gives me is the spirit (*hau*) of the *taonga* that I have received from you and that I gave him. The *taongas* I have received for these *taongas* that came from you, I have to give them back. It would not be right for me to keep them for myself, whether they are desirable (*rawe*) or unpleasant (*kino*). I have to give them to you because they are a *hau* of the *taonga* that you gave me. If I would keep this second *taonga* for me, this could harm me, seriously, even deadly. Such is the *hau*, the *hau* of the personal property, the *hau* of the *taongas*, the *hau* of the forest.”

This description illustrates clearly the nature of things and the spirit that is attached to them. This is the *hau*, i.e. the spirit that the item contains, that obliges the receiver to become giver in turn.

According to Mauss there are three obligations in the exchange: giving, receiving, and returning. It is a form of delayed exchange. Barter is nothing else than this process of gift, but without delay, in simultaneity. Barter is an impoverished form of gift's relationship because it contains the will of concluding immediately, of getting rid of the debt without delay, as if the time factor would make the

situation of the debtor unbearable. Barter is the first step in the dissolution of the social link and in the weakening of the spiritual force which links the members of a community.

It is interesting to notice that the understanding of the gift's relationship is widely spread among many cultures, even among our western societies. The logic of the gift becomes also the principle for justice; the Jewish word of *tsadaka* means for instance *justice*, but this word has evolved slowly to mean also *alms-giving*, especially since the victory of the spirituality of poverty in Jerusalem at the time of the Prophets, which gave shape to the doctrine of charity and alms-giving that impregnates the Bible and the Koran. In Hinduism and Christianity the practice of giving includes also the idea of later reward. Hospitality, especially in Islamic countries, is a general duty because the guest is always understood as sent by Allah. Religions are impregnated by the notion of reward for good conduct. But this is in fact more than a simple reward; the Paradise is not a place where good people go after death; this is in the present time the experience of joy for the one who gives himself generously. Moralism has deformed the original message of the law of causes and consequences which simply says that generosity calls for generosity which creates abundance, peace and joy. On the opposite of the potlatch no false dependence based on power is created by a moderate practice of gifts, because reciprocity works both ways in creating a double way harmony. It is why it is called reciprocity.

In our western mind we consider the Polynesian gift's practice as primitive. But it contains in fact a lot of wisdom, much more than our practice of market which sells the *hau* for a minimal price and puts in this way an end to any emerging relationship. When the *hau* becomes impossible to convert into money, it remains alive and continues to flow and generates gratitude, because we all love to give and to

¹⁸ Marcel Mauss: *Essai sur le don*. Année sociologique, 1923-24. Reedited by Quadrige-PUF. Paris. Here is my own translation as the extract was quoted in French.

receive gifts. Gratitude is this mysterious recognition that something broader takes care of our wellbeing; and especially that it cares for the way we feel, in the way we feel related to others, more than for what we have. In this sense accumulation is truly the negation of this living spirit that recognises life where it is truly active and flowing, instead of focusing on dead goods, in isolation and loneliness.

4) Reciprocity as true sharing

True reciprocity is based on generosity which does not calculate and on the sense of belonging that makes us happier and stronger.

Reciprocity is a principle which regulates exchanges in a very precise way although it is not based on a precise calculation of the values of what has been exchanged but it relies only on a strong obligation which links the receiver to the donor or the community and expects from the former to act in an ever more generous way. By contrast with the gift relationship, reciprocity encompasses all aspects of life and not only the goods that have been given with the expectation to be returned. It means that it includes not only goods but also work and sharing of knowledge, assistance when it is needed and all aspects of social interaction with their moments of joy and celebration as well as times of endurance through harsh circumstances. The fascinating aspect of reciprocity consists in the fact that, as already described, each exchange initiates a long chain of further exchanges because the right balance can never be found in past exchanges and each exchange calls for the next to happen. It is the opposite of market exchanges where each trading act is paid for and puts an end to the relationship. As we can see, reciprocity is based on a much wider understanding of exchanges that include all aspects of life from the most material to the most spiritual. What circulates in reciprocity is much more than just material goods; the

main flow is the flow of the spirit which links people one with another. It is based on generosity because unlimited giving is the way to celebrate the interdependence in the community and the gratitude for needing, and being needed by, the others. The whole body of pluralism takes shape as an antidote to globalisation, standardisation and individualism.

So far we have based our description of reciprocity on the understanding of the gift's relationship as Mauss describes it, in term of delayed exchanges. We will see now that reciprocity is in fact much more than a flexible practice of exchanges and that it is not sufficient to consider it as a form of exchange. Mauss has rightly insisted on the fact that it is the spirit of the giver, the *hau*, which is the true content and leading energy of the gift's relationship. The *hau* is precisely the quality which takes shape in this category of goods I have described earlier that become reality when they are shared, such as justice, peace, love, equality. The fact to share these qualitative goods freely offers the possibility to discover them and to make them active in our life. This special quality that appears when free sharing takes place is what the *hau* is about. The goods which are exchanged become in this way the support for something wider which cannot be grasped materially.

Reciprocity can be defined in this way: I give; in giving, I am; "in giving, I receive some being; I get some self in giving some me" as the French anthropologist Dominique Temple puts it. The spirit arises in this free form of reciprocity; the *hau* is not the cause but the consequence or the fruit of reciprocity.

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Dominique Temple and Mireille Chabal¹⁹ describe well the difference between exchange and reciprocity in a practice of giving which goes much beyond the need for splendour described by Mauss. In reciprocity the focus of the exchange switches from the object to the person. This appears very clearly in the comparison between the two descriptions made by the young Marx. In the first description, exchanges are shown to be focused on the acquisition of the object the other owns and each person becomes an instrument or a means for the acquisition and is deprived of his or her humanity. On the opposite, in the second description, the focus has fundamentally switched from the object to the persons who are involved in the exchange; the object becomes a personal expression of the creator and aims at answering the deepest need of the receiver; in this way it becomes a link between two expressions of humanity; the focus is the link between the two persons and the human nature of each one. The energy is no more the greed to get something for oneself but it is the spirit of creativity and attention to the needs of the other. In this sense there is a powerful contrast between our materialist society which focuses on material exchanges and the practice of reciprocity which focuses on the spirit of the people involved and on their human needs which include material necessities but mainly also affective and spiritual aspirations.

As a metaphor we can describe how atoms, as our solar system with its planets circulating around the sun, are made mainly out of empty space; only a few particles (electrons or more exactly probabilities of extremely fine granular matter) circulate at high speed around a dense kernel (protons and neutrons); like in our solar system, the quantity of matter is completely insignificant in relation to the huge empty space which remains between the different planets; what is essential

for the general equilibrium of matter is the action of the forces of attraction that hold the parts as a coherent whole, i.e. these forces of attraction that act across emptiness and keep the few particles in a narrow relationship. If we transpose this metaphor to our social settings, these forces of attraction represent the sense of interdependence and the human feelings that link us as a society; these forces can be called humanity, neediness, compassion, fragility, solidarity, generosity, ideal, vocation, love, need for recognition, etc. Although they are not visible, as the forces of attraction are not visible either, they constitute the essential of what holds matter together. Matter is only secondary to these forces that ensure the necessary coherence of the whole social body. Reciprocity is nourishing these forces (the links) more than the particles (the objects). It is why the practice of reciprocity is essential in our social experience as it allows us to grow in depth and to find meaning in life.

Reciprocity is like an alternative current which circulate in both directions. Each one cares for the needs of the other while remaining himself and respecting the distance and differences between the two people. Out of this relationship ensues the sense of identity for each one, by comparison with the person of the other as well as by personal creation. Reciprocity creates a dynamic relationship which is never fulfilled and calls for further developments. The value that reciprocity creates is not in the object but in the quality of this relationship.

In reciprocity the accumulation of goods has no meaning because storage would stop the flow and go against the essential need for enhancing and nourishing the links between people. According to Chayanov's law, "production" in subsistence societies stops when the needs are satisfied. Yet Dominique Temple notices that this law has

¹⁹ Dominique Temple et Mireille Chabal: *La réciprocité et la naissance des valeurs humaines*. L'Harmattan, 1995, Paris.

in fact its proper extension on the spiritual level where a kind of inversion takes place. In what concerns the *hau*, Chayanov's law is reversed, because the spiritual domain is limitless; when material basic needs are satisfied, the production of *hau* becomes indeed maximum. "It can be said that Tibetans (for instance) mobilise the sagacity of the wisest in order to obtain the maximum of spiritual profit from the productive forces of the community." It is when we start celebrating, chanting, dancing, linking just for the joy of being alive.

Production must of course first answer the basic material needs for survival and subsistence. As soon this aspect of life is ensured, reciprocity and gift's practice can develop freely. Giving becomes the way to get more being. Each one exists through what they give because they get recognition through what they offer. Who gives is transformed inasmuch as he or she becomes progressively what he or she aspires to be. In order to produce this new me, I need to build up this relationship that is based on the concern and on the care for the needs of the other, for his or her life conditions. The gift translates itself first into hospitality, into the offering of food, into protection. And this necessity to answer the needs of the other becomes the true reason why we have to produce goods: to become alive, I have to give, and to give I need to produce. As soon as the production of goods will answer the needs of all, production will orient itself toward more noble goods such as artistic composition, poetry, song, music, celebration, contemplation, wonder. This is the pure inversion of the inversion of life by market. This is practice of life as pure as it can be!

In this way we are far away from the logic of market. The logic of reciprocity leads us to create a society which masters the forces of market, because material exchanges are meant to be framed by the

general aim to generate compassion and solidarity, to create conditions for happiness, which is fundamentally what everybody aspires to. Aristoteles already noticed that the produce of reciprocity is grace, and that this feeling becomes soon friendship because grace makes the face of the other shine.

It is essential to see that exchanges and reciprocity can cohabitate. It is what happens in our modern society, yet with a strong dominance of market forces that have the tendency to eclipse the generosity of more spontaneous human relationships. We have to learn to discern which the active laws are: reciprocity in the family and the neighbourhood, competition and profit in the market. In extending the field of reciprocity, it means in subtracting most of our human relationships to the influence of market, we can succeed to increase the field of reciprocity and therefore the quality of our life together.

In the confrontation between an economy based on accumulation and an economy based on reciprocity, there is a striking misunderstanding that has marked the whole of our colonial past experience; Westerners went to southern countries to take and accumulate, and the indigenous populations welcomed them with many gifts and hospitality, until they noticed that it was not reciprocated and that goods were indeed circulating only in one direction, from them to the incomers. This fact has not much changed in our relationships with southern countries. It is still nowadays as Marx described it almost two centuries ago about the way we understand exchanges: what interests us is what we can import, without consideration for the other, neither finally for ourselves. Sad statement!

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What is dear (to us) is rare

Economists say: what is rare is dear (expensive). It is nonsense! In fact, what is dear to us is rare (valuable). We have to protect it.

This is the big inversion of life I have described. We adapt to what is the consequence of a dreadful evolution. Economy has become the totalitarian power which shapes our lives and creates so much inequity and suffering. We have to rebuild our world, starting from what is precious to us: our human relationships, our loved ones, beauty, life, peace, equity, creativity. And economics will have to adapt if we keep them under control. Our human values, such as life, love and peace, are fragile qualities we have to protect. They are recessive in the way they get destroyed by more violent and powerful trends. They can only thrive in protected areas, where fragile flowers can bloom. That is our duty to protect these qualities and our care for these special human qualities has to become our first priority. This is the basic condition to make life possible.

This is now your choice, reader: will you choose to become free of illusion and create a just world, or will you succumb to resignation and undergo the existing power of oppression? This is no heroic choice; it is just and simply the choice of your life. You do not need to change the world; you need only to do what brings happiness. Be free, be courageous, and you'll discover an unknown treasure. Let's all practise the true anthropology that brings harmony, at our own scale, locally, with our family, our neighbours, our friends, at work, at the shop, day by day. This is the true power of life which is hidden in our own creativity and awareness.

This is the challenge of gratuity, of the marvel at what is given freely. Even if we maintain the rule that work has to be compensated for, the

pure gift of life remains nevertheless a grace. This is the true core for happiness.

And let's us share what comes out of our attempts to be more authentic. Let's support each other in this discovery of another way to relate to one another. And economy will adapt. It has no other choice. Remember: life is about transformation. Every day is a new start, independent of what has happened before. Let's create our present in a new way.

And this transformation happens in two ways:

- 1) the transformation of ourselves when we discover the true meaning of life in its gratuity and generosity,
- 2) and the transformation of our local community when it discovers the laws of solidarity and of care.

1) The transformation of ourselves

As long we are obsessed by our own comfort and desires we cannot see how life is generous; we destroy indeed our own ability for life.

We are all citizens and consumers. There is no other economic, political or social system than the one we build together. We never stop saying that corporate interests falsify the way we are governed, but indeed we are the true actors who consolidate these oppressive powers by buying their products or being resigned that they do not represent our desires for more humanity. Of course each of us has little power, yet the practice of truth has a tremendous ability to change life when we abide by its rules.

Our main duty is to give up our obsession for ourselves and our anxiety to be lacking and not to be good enough. When we are more detached we can better observe how society works. We see then its mechanisms, its madness and its destructiveness because of the many inversions it has introduced, and will still do, in our lives.

Once we have become aware of this fundamental twist, we are no more obsessed by the dominating model and we become free to discover the deep harmony that governs life. Of course life remains messy and creates a lot of disorder and suffering. But this suffering has more sense when it is experienced freely on the path of transformation because it opens a door to harmony, peace and joy, that could not open as long as we were afraid of going through this transformation.

The only choice is: either suffering because we are afraid of life or experiencing life to the full in paying inevitably the price of pain as this pain cannot be expelled from life. While in the former case we are condemned to remain imprisoned in our fear, in the latter case we have the opportunity to enter a new realm of true freedom, the freedom of truth that brings true joy. When we open to this truth, we become able to see the other members of our local community as the different parts of a same body of which we are also parts and on which we depend. Our destiny is to share this common future.

2) The transformation of our community

When we are aware how the quality of our lives depends on the way we interact in our local community, transformation can happen.

Our local community is what we make of it. In our families we learned how we can foster a way of life that suits us. This is the same

in our neighbourhood and in our local community; we have to choose on which bases we want to build our relationships: greed and competition or solidarity and care?

When we understand that the latter path is richer, we need to establish a form of consensus to implement a type of development that focuses on our human values instead of being defined by external economic interests. Only consensus can bring this form of agreement. This basic agreement is never perfect; it is made of many compromises so that everybody can recognise it as an expression of the common will. Our differences make it probably more difficult, yet our complementarity makes it also more possible. Nevertheless anything we cannot agree upon will be defined by external factors at our disadvantage. It means that not agreeing equals not deciding or giving up. It is evident that the consensus has to be based on human values, and especially include the dimensions of gratuity and wonder in a way that will be life changing. It is precisely because these two qualities are so strongly challenging the present way of thinking that they can become the vectors for a real transformation.

When we learn to reach a level of minimum consensus, we need then to find the local and personal ways to implement it. It means a strict control of economic forces by the social group. Maturity is the only way that allows to master complexity. And the process remains all the time flexible because it needs to adapt and be readjusted in consequence of the experiences that have been made day by day.

This is certainly not the path of standardisation and readymade stability, but this is the path of life with its many surprises and its deep liveliness.

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Let's start now! Just the simple intention to follow this path will make a huge difference in our quality of life. Instead of being slaves, we will be borne to new human beings, in solidarity and care for one another. In the protected space we can create, life can thrive because it will not be chocked by the weeds of short-sightedness, at least not as much as today!

5) TEN COMMITMENTS FOR DAILY LIFE

In order to find a better harmony in our relationship with simplicity, we will conclude the present essay with the list of the following commitments we can propose for a change in our attitude.

10 commitments for a reconciliation with simplicity

In order to allow reconciliation between simplicity and wealth we should conform in our daily life to the following 10 commitments.

1) Social control: In our modern society the logic of market is the leading energy which shapes our life and imposes its power upon all people. Other aspirations such as human and spiritual values, however beautiful and inspiring they can be, are believed to have to adapt and submit to the “realism” of the materialistic world we have created. Capital (power of finance) controls work (human creativity and liveliness) although it should be the contrary. We want to reverse this trend because we want to live in a world built for the expression of humanity. We want to practise a form of radical control of economic forces by the awareness of society, i.e. of local communities which defend their own ability to decide about the quality of their present and future. We believe that this control necessitates a local consensus about priorities and the means to achieve it. We think that this is the pre-eminence of politics over economy, where politics is not understood as a struggle for power but as a common vision of the form of society to be implemented. Although it is the aim we have to focus on, this aim of a common vision can never be reached, because this search consists in the dynamic process of discovering together the

meaning of life and making it possible for all to access this special quality of experience.

- 2) Free resources: All natural and social resources we need for our subsistence are provided gratuitously by nature (life, water, air, food, energy) or by the social context (basic learning, education, social link, knowledge, spiritual teaching, social recognition, justice, peace, love). Only work to make these resources and qualities available (at the tap, in the shops, in books, at school or at work, in relationships) needs to be paid for because it has to provide the means for subsistence. We want to recognise this fundamental gratuity of resources and qualities as the fundament for our exchanges. We want to learn how to marvel about this gratuity and the unending discovery of its true nature. We want to base our exchanges on the gratefulness for these gifts and we want to care for these resources as a common wealth which has to be used in respect for the natural and the social contexts which provide them, i.e. in adapting to the laws of natural cycles and social harmony.
- 3) Subsistence as duration: Work is usually understood as a means for earning an income that is more or less proportional to the time invested into working. Yet needs for our subsistence are more or less in fact proportional to the time we live, and not to the time we work. This statement means that, once we have satisfied our needs for a given period of time, we do not need to earn more than we have for this same duration. In other words, work has for first function to provide subsistence (basic needs as well as immaterial ones); as soon as this is done, we can offer our work and creativity freely (by analogy with Chayanov’s law) because these energies (work and creativity) are by themselves free gifts of nature. Although all resources are free, goods cannot be free, for the simple reason that they include a defined part of incorporated work which has to be paid for, because work is time

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of subsistence and subsistence costs. We believe that there has to be no profit and no speculation on the prices of goods and services but these prices should represent only the part of cost which corresponds to the incorporated part of work. In consequence we want to offer freely our creativity as soon as our basic and simple needs are covered.

- 4) Work as creativity: *There is no such thing as production, but only transformation. Creativity is only the mode of finding new forms. Transformation is an endless process of adaptation of what is given into what is needed or desired, in endless cycles. Work is the force of transformation. Instead of being sold on the market as workforce, work is meant to constitute our main faculty for discovery, expression, creation of social link, gift of generosity. We want to free work from the power of capital. We want to make it a true way for personal expression and social recognition which encompasses all aspects of life, without distinction between shadow work, paid work, self-employed activity, subsistence work, leisure, recovery, etc.*
- 5) Four categories of goods: *We want to practise a clear distinction between the four following categories of goods and act accordingly, it means in sharing freely the goods that sharing makes more available: 1) The goods which cannot be divided unless destroyed, such as the natural laws and the systems of renewal of all the resources necessary for life, have to be cared for as whole systems and remain part of the commons (seasonal cycles, biodiversity, energy, land, climate, forests, water, etc.). 2) The goods which take shape when they are shared, such as the qualities of life, find their expression in the relationships and in reciprocity between people (peace, justice, equity, love, etc.). 3) The goods which multiply in the same proportion as they are shared, such as the accumulated teaching out of human past experience, have to be shared freely (knowledge, wisdom,*

imagination, etc.). 4) The goods which diminish in quantity when they are shared, because they are material entities, can nevertheless be made more easily accessible for use by all when they remain as part of the commons (buildings, infrastructure, tools, etc.). This other way of sharing that we want to implement for these four categories is based on the evaluation of our true needs in regard of the understanding that we have of the meaning of life. We believe that true needs can only be understood and truly perceived if no publicity, no fashion, no want for profit, no form of speculation or exploitation come to distort our personal or common views.

- 6) Extension of the commons: *The commons are the goods which cannot be owned privately and have to remain in common free access because they belong to one of the categories of goods which are necessary for subsistence. We want to extend the field of the commons as much as possible because, the more the commons are extended, the more people have access to many facilities: resources, energy, peace, silence, space, land, knowledge, wisdom, health, respect, love, tools, subsidies, etc. And the distinction between what is mine and what is yours becomes blurred, allowing a wider category to take shape: what belongs to nobody, such as the sun, the air, water, life, etc. We believe that the commons constitute the true wealth of a community. We want to be committed to the extension and protection of the commons which are based on the practice of attitudes such as cooperation, equality, care, self-limitation, generosity. Equal societies are more thriving than unequal ones.*
- 7) Money as a means for transfer of value only: *Money has been originally invented to make exchanges easier than barter (money is my ox in my pocket). The necessity to convert goods into a currency (an amount of money called price) has opened the door for speculation. Profit is theft because it retains for oneself*

(detaches) part of the value which should indeed remain attached to the good. The intention of profit and accumulation replaces today the purpose of satisfying needs and distorts our economic relationships. Exchanges have to be based on the gratuity of resources and on the minimal cost of work, which has to be limited to the covering of the costs of subsistence (incorporated work) for the corresponding duration of time. In accepting this rule for the calculation of prices, we want to leave no space for speculation or accumulation; it means that money has to remain only a means for transfer of value and not a tool for profit; and capital has to be used only as a neutral tool and not as a power. In eliminating profit and speculation, we want to enable the best circulation of goods in our local community in order to make them available for all. We believe that debt has to be avoided, interest rates to be kept to the level of cost index, investments to be financed by the law of numbers, wealth to be redistributed.

- 8) Life as an art of giving: The subtle energies of the Trinity [i.e. 1) the Father as the self-giving love and endless creation, 2) the Son as the form and expression that make the invisible energy of life perceptible, 3) the Spirit as the inspiration and life giving energy of transformation] are fundamentally negated by the destructive forces of the Anti-Trinity that fascinates us so much [1) the self-obsessed Power of domination, 2) the controlling illusion of Technology, 3) the competitive and destructive forces of Market]. Because we are aware that these two models are not only antagonist but also incompatible, we want to choose to be nourished by the life energy of the former and to oppose the destructive practice of the latter. We believe that culture (kinship or the understanding of our relationships to others and to life) consists in the art of living together rather than in the power of accumulation. We want to practise self-limitation and simplicity because they offer the necessary conditions for remaining open to

the harmony of life and the experience of our true identity as persons and human community.

- 9) Five main choices: We want to practise economic activities in a spirit which ensues out of the five main following choices: 1) Being aware that our world is at the edge of collapsing, we want to adapt urgently to the laws of nature and to the cycles of transformation, instead of trying to dominate what we cannot control. 2) We want to practise work as the main form of expression of our humanity that takes shape in all aspects of life, from the most basic wants to the most creative and spiritual needs; work is the principal opportunity for creating social links in diversity, interdependence and complementarity. 3) We want to practise a form of common sharing rather than to stick to the narrow-minded system of strict private ownership; sharing makes accessible for all what is available in the community and makes the community more prosperous. 4) We want to practise mutual care, instead of competition, as the basic rule of our local community; we choose to be on the side of the victims; care, attention and solidarity with victims are the true forms of compassion; equality and liberation are the factors which allow trust to become the vector for healthy relationships. 5) We want to practise non-violence as a spirit and strategy to face disagreements, tensions and conflicts; non-violence is the antidote to most of the destructive aspects of our present society (competition, greed, domination, exploitation, fear, destruction, etc).
- 10) Social option, redistribution. gift's relationship and reciprocity: Money and prices have become in our western society today the main criteria for our decisions. We believe that exchanges should avoid the use of money as much as possible in order to be focused on human values rather than being motivated by greed or aiming at profit. We prefer to practise all possible forms of exchanges

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which do not use money as their main objective. Social money, such as the LETS system, allows people without cash to become contractors and to integrate the network of economic and social exchanges. We need to implement a form of social option where attitudes and behaviours are led by ethical values and spiritual search, by a vision of what human relationships can be at their best. Redistribution, gift's relationship and reciprocity are the true ways for practising exchanges when no precise account is kept of what has been given and when exchanges rely on the moral obligation for returning the value of what has been received, which consists mainly in the spirit of the act of giving, rather than in the material value of goods. Reciprocity focuses on the person and the relationship instead of on the object. Reciprocity is a form of exchange of unlimited acts of generosity which call for more exchanges because the equilibrium is never reached and the intensification of exchanges generates new relationships which call for more sharing. Generosity and the need for social recognition become the vectors of more intense and more generous acts of giving. The produce of reciprocity is grace and "grace makes the face of the other shine".

LIST OF OPTIONS (TITLES AND SHORT WORDINGS)

An essay in seven volumes 2

CHANGE AS A SEARCH FOR TRUTH 4

A necessity for change 4
 Six imbalances 5
 The risk of generalisations 6
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1) TO BE AND TO HAVE 12

Misery, poverty, sufficiency and accumulation 12

The chain of transformation 12
 The chain of perception (or of transformation) changes facts into perceptions, then into interpretations and choices. 12

Misery, poverty and needs 13
 Misery is a strong lack of essentials (food, shelter, love); poverty is scarcity of means. Both depend on what basic needs are truly. 13

Self-limitation, sufficiency and subsistence 14
 Our social context stimulates our human weaknesses: a feeling of insecurity incites us to accumulate to escape the challenge of life. 14

Being, doing and having 15
 In our life, being is the most important need, much more essential than doing and having that often become escapes more than needs. 15

Love and joy as choices 15
 We have the tendency to wait for love and joy to come into our life and be experienced. Yet love and joy are our own decisions. 15

Material poverty and spiritual wealth 16

GDP, HDI and HPI 16
 We have invented scales to measure and compare development in different societies; yet they do not consider what should be grasped. 16

Exploitation, colonisation and depreciation 18
 Because they ignore qualitative aspects, our patterns of development create poverty by destroying sustainable ways of life. 18

Poverty of the wealthy 19
 In our rich communities terrible misery (isolation, destitution) can be found which contrasts very much with the available means. 19

Wealth of the poor 20
 In poor communities many treasures of relationships and solidarity, expressions of unknown joy and exuberance can be found. 20

True wealth 21
 Beyond water, food and shelter, the true riches of life are yet health, security, peace, trust, solidarity, knowledge, wisdom, love. 21

The 4 miseries of our world 22
 As for the chain of transformation, our misery arises from the facts, from our perceptions, from our interpretations or from our choices. 22

Material misery in the facts 23
 Solving material misery (facts of extreme lack of basic goods and services) is the first key for solving all other forms of misery. 23

Affective misery in our perceptions 23
 Affective misery (perception of the world) depends on our past experience, culture, heritage, privileges, beliefs, maturity, freedom. 23

Ethical misery in our interpretations 25
 Ethical misery (inability to interpret rightly and freely our perceptions) prevents us from understanding what is really happening. 25

Spiritual misery in our choices 26
 Spiritual misery (incapacity to make right and independent choices) prevents us from changing our ways of life and practising truth. 26

The privilege of poverty 28
 St Clare and Francis of Assisi had chosen to be poor because it was for them the only way to follow their path of spiritual freedom. 28

Vocation and subsistence

The freedom of spirit	28	Equality of all in relation to work	40
Our true capacity to embrace life depends on our detachment from comfort and on our capacity to challenge our representations.	28	As subsistence is the key for the remuneration of work, people are equal in relation to remuneration because their needs are similar.	40
2) THE BRICKS OF ECONOMY	30	Uncertainty of result	42
Work as creativity	30	If work is globally compensated for, the provided income is no more dependent on the quality of results; this freedom allows creativity.	42
The illusion of wealth creation	30	The end of privileges	42
Industrial society pretends to create wealth; production is in fact an illusion because it consists only in transformation of what is given.	30	Specialised trained professionals argue that it is right that they earn more because of their investments, commitments, responsibilities.	42
Gratuity of resources	31	The contradiction of work	43
All resources are free of charge: life, air, sunshine, water, food, love, education... except for the work necessary for providing them.	31	Work is a creative process of expression that concerns our whole being; yet it has been reduced to a simple good sold on the market.	43
Work as creative transformation	32	Breaking the equation “work = money”	45
Work is our best form of creativity, expressed in the way we adapt to our environment; being and creativity are freely given to us.	32	Work as such has nothing to do with money. We created this destructive link that should be abolished to make us free to live fully.	45
Transformation as life embodiment	34	Protect work from market pressure	46
Transformation is the movement of creativity which embodies our life energy and awareness into something we value most.	34	Work can escape the pressure of market when it is not converted into money, is bartered, is exchanged for local currency or is free.	46
Shadow work	35	Accumulation versus circulation and sharing	48
Most of our work is not paid: household work like cooking, cleaning, education of children, gardening, maintenance...	35	As long as individuals do not retain for themselves the product of common creativity, it remains in circulation, accessible for all.	48
Shadow work of the universe	35	Security by numbers or by accumulation	49
The whole universe works ceaselessly for our wellbeing; such shadow work is more essential than any other form of work.	35	Hunter-gatherers rely on the solidarity of many to provide security; modern age relies on egocentric accumulation by individuals.	49
Necessary compensation for work	36	Chayanov’s law	50
Although creativity is freely given, work needs to be compensated for as it is linked with the duration of our subsistence and its needs.	36	The greater the ratio of workers to consumers in a household, the less each worker produces; production stops as needs are covered.	50
The main components of transformation	37	The corollary of Chayanov’s law	50
Goods are composed of material (natural resource), knowledge (experience), creativity (spirit) and duration of subsistence (work).	37	When subsistence is ensured, the community can consecrate itself to spiritual search: the intensity of production becomes maximum.	50
The main components of price	38	The choice for free giving	51
The price of goods has to express 1) the gratuity of resources, 2) the cost of embedded work, 3) the cost of subsistence, with no profit.	38	Once we have satisfied our needs for subsistence, we can choose to work for free; it is our freedom to offer our time and creativity.	51

A pension for life	52	5) Capital: control of interest rate	66
If the community provides each member with a compensation for creativity that covers subsistence, it is like a pension for life.	52	As speculation is one of the calamities of our times, the interest rate has to be severely controlled, made equal to the cost of living index.	66
Private ownership as deprivation	53	5) Capital: access to financial means	67
1) Ownership: private property as deprivation	54	Other collective forms of access to cash than debt have to be made possible: small credits, common investments, bartering, reciprocity.	67
Private property is a right to reduce the access others can have to resources and to limit one's own use to what one owns individually.	54	5) Capital: growth as organic adaptation	68
2) Land as our teacher	55	Growth is not a fruit of speculation but a process of organic adaptation similar to our physical growth: it is qualitative and slow.	68
We belong to the land more than it belongs to us: it is our teacher. It reveals us the laws of nature and life to which we have to adapt.	55	6) Knowledge / commons: necessity for sharing	70
2) Land: land is one	56	Knowledge has to be shared freely as part of the commons: shared knowledge multiplies instead of depriving the ones who share it.	70
Many species and many nations are used to share the same territory; land "belongs" to those who cultivate it for subsistence.	56	6) Knowledge / commons: free access	71
2) Land: ownership as land destruction	57	The wealth of a community relies on the breadth, diversity and depth of its commons and how they are accessible for all members.	71
Private ownership speculates on land value; it prevents sold land from being used for lesser financial return (e.g. food production).	57	6) Knowledge / commons: the risk	72
3) Resources: natural resources as a gift from nature	58	Managing and preserving the commons is not easy; conflicts of interests arise, especially in the short term or because of privileges.	72
Resources are not dissociated from land and nature; we are all parts of a wider system of interdependence ruled by natural cycles.	58	Community control over market	73
4) Infrastructure: its 3 qualities	60	The local community has to keep control over economic and market relationships, in conformity with its own social project (consensus).	73
A good infrastructure offers the (ecologically, ethically) best adapted means for the right purpose; it remains accessible to many.	60	The magic law of economics	74
5) Capital: power or motivation	61	Privileging simple tools over products means privileging processes over results, human beings over objects, spirit over matter.	74
Capital is a potential that has to be converted into work, resources and means; for distribution to many or for concentration for a few.	61	A new anthropology	75
5) Capital: social capital	62	The bricks of economy described here design a new anthropology based on human relationships, creativity, sharing, equality, caring.	75
Social capital relies on community: consensus on priorities (ideal, support of all) and self-limitation (resilience, empowerment).	62	The law of gratuity and gratitude	76
5) Capital: constitution by numbers	63	The new anthropology can be summarised by the word "gratuity": the marvel or gratitude for what is given at each instant of our life.	76
Capital (available accumulated financial means) should mainly arise through the law of numbers and be used in the present.	63		
5) Capital: debt as illusion	65	3) MONEY AND MARKET	77
Credit has been extended to a wild extreme by the capitalist system to increase consumption as a base for profit; debt is not productive.	65		

Vocation and subsistence

The twist of money	77
Kinship or money	77
In the West money and market replace kinship relationships; the market regulates each human link (exchange) as a closed entity.	77
Barter as a global exchange	78
Despite their unequal values, undivided goods can be bartered because the exchange satisfies the basic needs of both actors.	78
Money as an intermediary	78
In sales money introduces a third term as intermediary support requiring successive translations of values into a neutral yardstick.	78
The 4 temptations of money	79
Money as an intermediary support of value stimulates tendencies for speculation, sense of ownership, competition and exclusion.	79
The 3 fundamental illusions about money	80
The use of money is based on 3 conventions (forms of trust): unlimited conversion, universal yardstick, ability to buy anything.	80
Market and motivation	82
Market economy and local market	82
Market economy is the so called self-regulating force between offer and demand that has little to do with what we call the local market.	82
Machines and overproduction	84
At the industrial revolution when machines allowed producing more than needed, our society was deeply affected in its structure.	84
Overproduction and hyper competition	85
Because it allows producing excesses, overproduction transforms deeply our needs and becomes the new leader of market economy.	85
The 3 kinds of motivation for economic activity	87
Our motivations for economic activity can be 1) subsistence, 2) social link, recognition, personal expression or creativity, 3) profit.	87
Market against culture	88
When the market regulates relationships between people, it destroys the density and depth of the social links they have established.	88

Three quantum leaps in our evolution	89
Three main quantum leaps have marked the evolution of mankind: the birth of agriculture, the Renaissance, the industrial revolution.	89
The great materialistic inversion	91
Each quantum leap had created a new fiction to which mankind had to adapt in sacrificing a spiritual quality to a material quantity.	91
The inversions by market economy	92
The 50 inversions by market	93
We can describe how the laws of market generate inversions of the laws of life in creating fictions that become realities in our lives.	93
1) The law of value and price	94
Value is an ever changing personal and subjective perception while the price is the product of speculation by market forces.	94
2) The law of values without prices	94
The market ignores what cannot be sold and the immaterial values which cannot be used for profit (nature, justice, love, peace).	94
3) The law of value and disvalue	95
The market decides what has value, and what has none, what will become a disvalue and will hence be discarded.	95
4) The law of price as a measure for everything	96
The market reduces all dimensions of life to only one: the price, which becomes the only parameter of our decisions.	96
5) The law of absence of ethics	96
In the eyes of the market, nothing is sacred. The world is value free. Everything is equal, indifferent. There is no more hierarchy.	96
6) The law of violence	97
Market is about domination and power. Violence is at the core. The weapons trade is the marriage between violence and market.	97
7) The law of scarcity or artificial penury	98
By imposing money as the key for access to goods, even to the most necessary ones, the market creates scarcity and penury.	98
8) The law of illusion of added value	99
The market claims that the value of a product increases with its price: yet a real increase in value depends on real improvement.	99

9) The law of illusion of loan and debt	99	20) The law of one scale – killing of diversity	111
Banks create new money, or speculate for credits to provide high benefits on interests, in general at a high cost for the borrower.	99	There is only one scale: material ownership, prestige and power. Everybody will be evaluated according to this unique scale.	111
10) The law of ill-adapted evaluation tools	100	21) The law of identity	111
The evaluation tools of economy measure quantities (prices), instead of evaluating the quality of processes and nature of flows.	100	The ladder principle is meant to provide our identity, in a hierarchy established on market values. Identity is understood as competition.	111
11) The law of money as social link	101	22) The law of things and no-being	112
The market imposes money as a form of social link onto the social network, in replacement of existing patterns of relationships.	101	On the one scale of the market only things can be measured; and people become things (no-beings) as workforce, consumers.	112
12) The law of appropriation of the commons	102	23) The law of victimisation	113
The market conquers everything it can (if not protected), such as the common wealth that should remain accessible to everyone.	102	The one scale requires that there are people on the top who live on the expenses of people at the bottom; the system needs victims.	113
13) The law of privatisation versus socialisation	102	24) The law of masculinity	114
The market tends to privatise what can generate privileges and benefits, and to socialise what can generate costs and obligations.	102	The market exacerbates masculine activities (production of things) at the expense of feminine attitudes (subsistence and care).	114
14) The law of destruction of public services	104	25) The law of accumulation-immobilisation-concentration	115
The private sector takes over what it can profitably conquer; there is no more care for the common good or concept of public services.	104	When we accumulate wealth, we retain what should circulate and deprive others or ourselves from sharing / enjoying this wealth.	115
15) The law of private property and individualism	104	26) The law of acceleration of accumulation	116
The market system is based on two sacred principles: absolute protection of private property and celebration of individualism.	104	Accumulation provides owners of capital with increasing possibilities for profit; this means general impoverishment for all.	116
16) The law of competition	106	27) The law of speculation and speculation on speculation	117
The world becomes a battle field where individual interests compete. Competition replaces the natural law of cooperation.	106	Work does not make us rich; speculation on the value of ‘things’ allows profit; shares allow speculating on potential profits.	117
17) The law of inequity	108	28) The law of financial deal as devaluation of work	118
Social status is defined by how much more one owns than the other. The higher the social ladder, the more prestige at the top.	108	As economic activities are reduced to a mere provider of profit, work loses its significance as creative and link producing process.	118
18) The law of mimetic desire	108	29) The law of reduction of people to workforce / consumers	119
Advertisements generate uniformity and the want for what others have. Competition is based on sterile imitation, i.e. conformism.	108	Work is considered just as one of the components of production to be paid at a minimum rate to make the financial deal optimum.	119
19) The law of everlasting desire	110	30) The law of humiliation and inferiority complex	120
Acquisitive desire loses interest for what it gets and moves to the next unreachable object. Satisfaction is impossible, greed remains.	110	By denying work its value as human expression, the market lets us believe that money is the only motivation for work. Humiliation!	120

Vocation and subsistence

31) The law of uprooting for economic reasons	121
As the market plays with transport and dislocation of activities, people have to migrate for their survival, uprooting themselves.	121
32) The law of social division (the carrot and the stick)	122
Contractors have learned to play with the employees in offering minor personal advantages in order to break workers solidarity.	122
33) The law of accentuation of exclusion and precariousness	123
The reinforcement of conditions of fragility and dependency makes people more submissive and therefore more “adaptable”.	123
34) The law of increase of domination in the name of poverty	123
The struggle against poverty becomes the slogan which allows more globalisation and free trade, which profit essentially the rich.	123
35) The law of standardisation at the lowest common denominator	124
Domination is an impoverishing force that is flattening the world in destroying what creates contrasts, accents, antinomies.	124
36) The law of monopoly	125
The growth of corporations/institutions imposes an exclusive way of satisfying needs (i.e. consumption) at the expense of self-care.	125
37) The law of overgrowth	127
Corporations/institutions tend to expand beyond their capacity to master the goods/services they offer. Overgrowth creates chaos.	127
38) The law of creation of poverty	129
Growth tends to concentrate on goods/services that serve the rich more able to consume them; they become inaccessible for the poor.	129
39) The law of destruction of the coherence of traditional societies	131
Market introduces exploitation, colonisation, de-structuration, de-valorisation and seduction into traditional societies.	131
40) The law of destruction of natural resources (environment)	132
The access to natural resources generates their exhaustion and the pollution or destruction of the environment until nothing is left.	132
41) The law of globalisation and imbalance of exchanges	133
Globalisation aims at extending market to increase accumulation of wealth; yet it should care for compensating impoverishment.	133

42) The law of the shock doctrine	135
Any degradation of the economic situation of a country will be the opportunity to enforce more neoliberal and totalitarian domination.	135
43) The law of international (neoliberal) institutions	136
The main international dominating institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) impose conditions that serve the extension of free market.	136
44) The law of democratic incompatibility	138
Free market is said to be the way to democracy. Nonsense! Freedom for all can only arise when market is under social control.	138
45) The law of enslavement of the client to corporation’s interests	139
The client is no more a king but the slave of the interests of the corporation; his needs are only considered to keep him as a buyer.	139
46) The law of complexity at the cost of control by community	140
The multiplicity of external actors makes the local situation more difficult to understand; complexity is a factor of colonisation.	140
47) The law of whitewashing and corruption	141
The market cleans the products from all traces of suffering, exploitation and destruction which characterise their production.	141
48) The law of virtuality	141
The action of market is based on virtuality: the creation of false illusions or hopes, to manipulate, divert attention, hide corruption.	141
49) The law of the haze and the tortoise (neo-liberalism)	142
All, whether poor or rich, run the same race: no consideration for inequalities in health, education, wealth, tools, climate, politics.	142
50) The law of all inversions (summary)	143
The role of economy is to satisfy the needs of all. Yet false premises (false beliefs) have deterred exchanges from doing so.	143

4) THE NEW WAY **145**

A fundamental and spiritual choice **145**

Trinity and Anti-Trinity	146
Our modern society adores its Anti-Trinity (Power-Technology-Market), a negation of the true Trinity (Life-Incarnation-Love).	146

1) Father vs Power	147
While the Father is the energy of life that gives himself freely, Power is a means to conquer and dominate, to oppress and destroy.	147
2) Son vs Technology	149
While the Son is expression, incarnation that makes love visible, Technology imposes itself as manipulation that shapes the world.	149
3) Spirit vs Market	151
While the Spirit is energy of love which inspires and unites, Market is a force of greed, fear, accumulation, exclusion, violence.	151
Matter and Spirit	152
Our spiritual energies are making the world what it is; they catalyse material forces. They need to be rooted in the living Source.	152
The fundamental choice	153
About Trinity / Anti-Trinity: the main thing is not the difference but their incompatibility and the fact we have to choose between them.	153
Breaking the paradox of free market	155
Paradoxically the destructive trends of free market, instead of questioning its logic, reinforce its power; the antidote is awareness.	155
A question of life and death	156
We have only a few years left to implement a radical change; if not destruction, poverty, globalisation and violence will annihilate us.	156
The 5 choices – fear or trust	158
We need to make a collective choice for trust, instead of for fear, to allow us to practise adaptation, expression, sharing, care, peace.	158
1) Adaptation or domination	159
In a world with limited resources and finite growth we have to adapt to the laws of nature; simplicity is wealth; small is beautiful!	159
2) Expression or workforce	159
Work includes all aspects of human life as an act of creation, a means to be recognised; human values have to preserve this quality.	159
3) Sharing or ownership	160
We have to change from the logic of ownership to one based on open sharing: free access to use offers more satisfaction for many.	160

4) Care or competition	161
Competition means many losers and a few winners; in caring for all and striving for equality we allow everybody to become richer.	161
5) Peace or violence	163
It is never said how much our society is based on the practice of violence: war, exploitation (man, nature), competition, “us - them”.	163
A world in transition	166
A non-violent attitude as an answer to conflicts does not aim at changing our world but at finding our own way to be in harmony.	166
Messiness and perfection	167
Despite its harmony, life is messy because it is the result of many conflicting forces; our true path is perfection in the right attitude.	167
The actor and the spectator	167
While we act in our own life, we can also simultaneously be the observer or distant spectator of who we are and how we are acting.	167
True identity	168
Our true essence is not found in accumulation but in experiencing the flow of what is gratuitously given, in discovering it more deeply.	168
Recomposing the elements of a new anthropology	169
We need to recombine (attune) the positive gains of our modern civilisation with the spiritual orientation of our new anthropology.	169
Recomposing the life giving parameters	170
Backcountry and seashore	170
Two types of societies have developed in the past: the inner country living from agriculture, and the seashore cities living from trade.	170
Choices in polarities	172
Recombining the compatible qualities to be selected out of opposed models: food/things, subsistence/trade, autocracy/democracy, etc.	172
1) Subsistence or trade	172
Food production as an answer to basic needs is effortful and tends to be “abandoned” for trade as an easier means for wealth.	172
2) Food or things	173
The requirement to produce one’s own food does not exclude the practice of specialised trades or the access to immaterial goods.	173

Vocation and subsistence

3) Work or capital	175	4) Goods which diminish when shared	187
Nowadays capital is controlling work; yet work is creativity and life. It should be the key, and capital only the well mastered means.	175	Some goods diminish when they are shared: these are all the material goods. Avoiding their division can make them more available.	187
4) Creativity or production	177	The 4 ways to share goods	187
Not production but the satisfaction of basic needs is the purpose; and the creative aspect of work is the key of the way to plenitude.	177	For each category of goods a proper way to be shared: respect of wholeness, a quality implemented together, free exchange, sharing.	187
5) Autocracy or democracy	178	1) Respect of the whole + restrained equal access	187
Democracy is understood as a struggle for power by the majority. Yet only consensus (i.e. compromise) allows minorities to be heard.	178	General equilibriums must be respected as whole systems. The life supporting goods they produce (food) must be shared in equity.	187
6) Welfare or wealth	179	2) A quality to be implemented together + reciprocity	188
When growth and wealth are the leading forces of a community, the capacity (awareness) to care for the welfare of all is impaired.	179	Immaterial qualities arise because all together we give them a shape; they arise in open sharing and reciprocity; all take part in it.	188
7) Equality or domination	180	3) Free access + free exchange	189
The main strength of a community is its consensus for equity and non-violence that makes sharing and common wealth possible.	180	Common goods like knowledge multiply when they are shared; their access and exchange have to remain free and common for all.	189
8) Stability or diversity	181	4) Self-restraint and equity + common access	190
Traditional teaching can prevent change, yet it offers guidance (to be reinterpreted); how can it combine with opening to diversity?	181	Goods which diminish when shared need to be used with restraint; they diminish less when their access remains open to all.	190
9) Identity or hospitality	182	The vernacular model or practice of subsistence	190
Group identity usually defines itself over against “the other”; yet poor societies show how hospitality is the richest way to diversity.	182	The 8 qualities of the vernacular model	191
A different way of sharing	183	Vernacular economy is an all-encompassing generous feminine caring way of providing all members with quality goods of all sorts.	191
The 4 categories of goods	183	1) Home economy	192
Some goods are destroyed when divided; some have to be shared to take shape; some truly multiply when shared; others diminish.	183	As there is no conversion into money, transformation is based on true needs and generates living human relationships in reciprocity.	192
1) Goods which cannot be divided unless destroyed	184	2) Subsistence and needs	193
Some goods form an entity which cannot be subdivided without being destroyed: all the laws of equilibrium and life resources.	184	Subsistence is regulated by priorities of urgency in a wider range of needs (Chayanov), including subjective needs (recognition, love).	193
2) Goods which take shape when shared	185	3) Adaptability to natural laws	194
Some goods can only take shape when they are shared: these are the qualities of our social life such as justice, peace, love, beauty.	185	Adaptation to natural cycles and laws becomes a priority because survival depends on the care for, and respect of, the environment.	194
3) Goods which multiply when shared	186	4) Self-limitation	196
Some goods multiply in width and depth in the same proportion as they are shared: such are the different aspects of knowledge.	186	Self-limitation can be imposed by the fragility of local nature; or it can be freely chosen as the best way to harmony and full life.	196

5) Never ending process	197	2) The transformation of our community	219
Transformation is more process oriented than result oriented; it is a never ending cycle which involves cooperation and creation.	197	When we are aware how the quality of our lives depends on the way we interact in our local community, transformation can happen.	219
6) Feminine and anti-patriarchal	198		
Femininity cares for all, emphasises quality of relationships at the cost of hierarchy and resists patriarchal models of domination.	198	5) TEN COMMITMENTS FOR DAILY LIFE	221
7) The unisex issue	201	10 commitments for a reconciliation with simplicity	221
Our trade system has uniformed our ways of being, disconnecting them from our own personality which is linked with our gender.	201	In order to allow reconciliation between simplicity and wealth we should conform in our daily life to the following 10 commitments.	221
8) Diversity and complementarity of activities	204		
The tendency not to specialise but to produce most necessities generates a very wide range of activities; diversity means stability.	204	LIST OF OPTIONS (TITLES AND SHORT WORDINGS)	225
Redistribution, LETS, gift and reciprocity	205		
The 4 main social options	205		
Four social options to bring more equality can be described: redistribution, non-monetary exchanges, gift's relationship, reciprocity.	205		
1) Redistribution	208		
When people use money to bring more equity and justice, and offer more opportunities for all, money can become this good tool.	208		
2) Non-monetary exchanges - LETS	210		
A social currency is a way of accounting for exchanges without money so that people without cash can be involved in economic life.	210		
3) Gift's relationship	213		
Gifts are a form of delayed barter whose conditions have not been negotiated but rely on the obligation of giving back the value.	213		
4) Reciprocity as true sharing	215		
True reciprocity is based on generosity which does not calculate and on the sense of belonging that makes us happier and stronger.	215		
What is dear (to us) is rare	218		
Economists say: what is rare is dear (expensive). It is nonsense! In fact, what is dear to us is rare (valuable). We have to protect it.	218		
1) The transformation of ourselves	218		
As long we are obsessed by our own comfort and desires we cannot see how life is generous; we destroy indeed our own ability for life.	218		