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Recessive and dominant

*towards a reconciliation
between feminine and masculine
on the search for a new anthropology*

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An essay in seven volumes

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

- 0) **Community and self-limitation:**
starting a move towards change.
- 1) **Effort and comfort:**
towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity
on the search for harmony and peace of mind.
- 2) **Vocation and subsistence:**
towards a reconciliation between simplicity and wealth
on the search for care and equity.
- 3) **Recessive and dominant:**
towards a reconciliation between feminine and masculine
on the search for a new anthropology.
- 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
- 1) Knowledge and learning: towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect
- 2) 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

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.

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 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

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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local culture and conditions, consists of a personal or collective choice which depends on us only and on the way we want to interact 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 pre-eminence 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.

The gender experience

1) THE GENDER EXPERIENCE

Since the origin of time, gender has been one of the principal characteristics on which our social construct has been built, because it has always been the basic element of reproduction and expression of life, long before it became also the topic of any anthropology or of any sociological transformation or interpretation. The paradox is that gender became much more than a biological character as soon as it has been principally translated into a social component, which is from time immemorial constantly shaping the main aspects of our society and culture, although the origin of the fundamental difference between both genders is first not social but biological. It is then worth starting our reflexion on gender issues by trying to go back to the root of the difference: beyond its social interpretation what is the original gender experience that ensues out of the organic difference?

Two natures – two experiences

The gender paradox: biological or social

In our social construct we have forgotten that it is gender itself that fosters genetically a fundamental difference of life experience.

This is a very positive inheritance of modernity that we are able today to question our respective social roles and especially to reflect on how the differences between genders are impacting on the way we build our social relationships. Beyond biological differences social relationships are shaped principally by our representations how each gender does or should experience life. Most societies, despite their many differences, have long been used to believe that gender, as an

important qualifier of identity, is meant to define what is possible and acceptable for each person, precisely because of an untold link between role and gender. Yet we dare nowadays to question in which way our respective genders constitute an essential dimension of our being and how far this difference should determine our level of personal empowerment in our social surroundings and the mode of our integration into the social fabric.

The great paradox in the way we treat the gender issue today is that it is often considered from an essentially social point of view before it is related to the biological difference that grounds our diversity. We address the inequalities that are based on gender differences – and it is urgent to do so - before we refer to the fundamental organic difference and before we try to know what the true essence of this difference originally is. This shortcut in the method, because it does not go back to the real root of the issue, leads often the advocates of equality - because they want justice to be soon implemented - to talk as if there were no difference between genders. Yet equality is not incompatible with differences. In fact there are many important differences between both genders and that is what makes the topic so fascinating!

I believe that we will only be able to change the way we look at gender if we start from the following evidence: the difference between genders is a fundamental one and it is originally of biological nature. Women give birth and men do not. Men beget and women do not. Based on this essential difference, our respective life experiences can only be fundamentally different for women and men. This does not mean that all our experiences are different but it means that this organic difference is the root of the issue. Yet this does not mean that this organic difference should be interpreted as the cause for a hierarchy of values between genders. It is evident that this

fundamental difference calls just for complementarity, because it is its *raison d'être*. And this whether we are parents or not, because the biological difference impacts much beyond maternity and paternity.

Before we investigate what culture makes out of gender, I propose to try first to rediscover in which way genders, because of their biological difference, foster different life experiences and therefore different perceptions of life that will then generate further different understandings of what life is, or further different attitudes in our reactions to life circumstances. And this before any social construct comes to consolidate these differences or exploits them. The question which will be our starting point asks: what is the original gender experience? I hope that we can go back so far, without our perceptions being too strongly biased by what we know of the social construct that is inevitably linked with this essential difference.

Two contrasting experiences

Pregnancy teaches women the introverted attention for care while the male partner develops extroverted skills as provider of structure.

Women during pregnancy experience mainly what happens inside themselves, i.e. in their womb but also in their psyche. This character of introversion is evidently not an absolute law because each one reacts in their own way but it is at least an objective statement of where things happen.

On the contrary men are not in touch with this inner experience because they do not have direct access to it, although they learn more and more in our modern society to take part in it in an indirect way. Traditionally men become rather naturally and spontaneously aware

of their role as providers of the external conditions for structure and safety.

In this fundamental difference between the respective roles of the two parents lays probably the potential for conflict and oppression as it can also be perceived as the opportunity for complementarity and harmony. The feminine role appears to focus essentially on the depth of an inner experience of giving life, yet also of vulnerability of being exposed to the risks of a fragile process, while the masculine role is defined by a form of exclusion from something he cannot access directly yet also by a form of strength that ensues out of his role to become main provider and protector of this life giving fragility.

This description seems almost very simplistic but it seems also to contain all the premises of what grounds the difference of experiences between genders. On one hand there is, on the female side, the depth of experience of the power of giving birth that remains mysterious and fragile, while on the other hand there is, on the male side, a feeling of exclusion compensated by a real power of protection. These two powers are of very different natures and can easily compete because they seem very exclusive of one another. Each partner can therefore envy fundamentally what the other has access to: the male envies women for fostering life while the woman envies men for defining the external structure. The conflict may only be avoided when both partners understand their respective specialised role as a contribution to a wider whole picture they are indeed creating together. They have to learn to participate in the experience of the other through the other and to play their own role as a gift to the new life which takes shape and as a contribution to the global common experience, even, normally, in agreement and cooperation one with another.

The gender experience

This form of specialisation that arises out of biological differences will nevertheless extend beyond the birth and very probably characterise both experiences also during the early stages of development of the new born child after birth and during the early years of childhood. It remains engraved in the species and will be transmitted to further generations as an inheritance about what gender is. Out of this picture (which remains a pattern more than a practical reality) we are all individually, more or less, free to shape our lives, by identifying with the pattern or by taking more liberty with its modelling power. Yet, independently of the personal freedom, the social frame and its own culture have consolidated specific roles for each gender and never stop putting pressure to conform to this consolidated role model.

Yin and Yang

Feminine and masculine qualities are complementary to one another and they combine in infinite ways that always mingle.

Chinese philosophy has described how opposites are able to combine and become complementary. Yin and Yang as opposites combine without end and each one is always present in the other. The Yin-Yang symbol expresses it well: in a circle the respective proportions between white and black evolve from a minimum to a maximum and in the maximum of the one there is still a minimum of the other (a dot). Yin and Yang are two poles that combine in many ways. There is never a total contrast between black and white and none is ever complete because there is always a bit of black in the white; and reciprocally. This is also what happens with femininity and masculinity: they are never pure but each one can nevertheless be identified for what they are. To become complete they need one another.

The female experience of fostering life and giving birth generates feminine qualities of care and nurturing skills of introversion. The masculine experience of providing the necessary conditions for safety generates qualities of protection and structuring skills of extraversion. This is the basic difference that ensues out of the fundamental difference in respective gender experiences, yet it is indeed only a dominant tendency that does not exclude the development of other secondary (or even predominant) qualities and skills. The contrast is never absolute, it is never so sharp: we all have also many diversified tendencies to develop our own aptitudes and also complementary skills but yet we do this in relatively contrasting ways and proportions, given our gender and our personality; whether female or male, we are always a bit of both. It means that, like in the combination of Yin and Yang, the male, although principally male, will also develop some feminine qualities while the female, although principally female, will also develop some masculine qualities. The nature or proportion of feminine and masculine qualities vary very much from one person to the next. It happens even often that some men may have acquired more feminine qualities than some other women do, yet without ceasing so far to be men; and reciprocally. In fact we are all men and women at the same time, masculine and feminine, in proportions that vary according to our gender but also to our person. Gender is a complex issue that is far from being predefined by our sex.

Yin in Chinese philosophy represents the quality that is introverted, caring, accepting, nurturing. Yang is the quality that is extraverted, defending, structuring. We recognise here the distinction I have established between gender experiences. Each individual develops also complementary faculties independently of the experience that their own gender fosters principally.

Yin and Yang form in this way two poles that create the right tension between contrasting faculties or attitudes. There arises a form of tension and antagonism that is creative, a form of antinomy that helps the opposed extremes to combine while they appear not to be exclusive.

This description is yet incomplete because it ignores the main factor which is the general balance of these two antagonistic forces. This is the third factor without which the pattern cannot be complete. The balance is not a dualistic solution but it is a ternary equation, i.e. with three factors: the Yin, the Yang and the right balance between both. This is a dynamic movement that never stops evolving because of the presence of these three factors. It is how dynamic is created and maintained in a living energy.

Yin or feminine qualities

Motherhood is the expression of Yin that encompasses feminine qualities, providing life, gentleness, care and understanding.

If she is truly involved in her motherhood, the mother is attentive to what happens in herself when she is pregnant and a new life, independent of her own, develops in the deepest part of herself. She becomes a womb, focused on interiority. She is endurance and protection; she is intuition and understanding for this fragile being that takes shape. In this way women develop faculties that are linked with their role as mothers and that help them to better take this role upon themselves. Is this attitude of receptivity ingrained in their genes or is it acquired through the function of motherhood and the social position it confers? It is probably true that both causes interact and create a new inborn and acquired identity as mother and wife and

woman. Function and experience are both real and change the person. The pattern repeats itself but the experience changes. The experience of motherhood for the last born child is different from the one for the first born. And each woman is free to reinterpret her role in order to play it in her own way.

Yet, beyond the real function of motherhood that has to answer the needs of the child, there is a wider set of roles and representations that are dictated from outside by the social context. Beyond the proper care for the child there is a whole wider culture of what motherhood should look like. Culture is a social construct that structures the inheritance of individual and collective experiences accumulated in the past into a set of patterns or rules meant to foster the behaviour of present and future generations. These patterns dictate a model of behaviour that can be very helpful for beginners as it can also be limiting for more mature people. It is the vocation of each woman to reinterpret her own role in order to answer the needs of the child and find her own balance as mother and woman while integrating harmoniously into the social context as a person not only defined by her gender and role as mother.

If motherhood is the true core of femininity at its origin, it does not nevertheless define femininity in its complete range. Motherhood is only the first spark that initiates the process of forging an archetype called woman. Motherhood is the root of the archetype but womanhood is not depending on becoming a mother. The identity of woman exists independently of the archetype, even if the biological difference has been, at the origin, the root of this archetype. Yet, independently of the role of motherhood, the root defines also the basic quality and the orientation of the general growth trend of women in adapting to, or on the contrary diverging from, the archetype. It is not astonishing therefore that femininity as such (i.e.

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then without explicit link with motherhood) develops also into attitudes of deeper understanding, protection, nurturing and care. Receptivity and understanding remain, it seems, the main orientation of this aptitude to answer originally the needs of the growing child and that develops in many forms of femininity beyond motherhood. It seems this constitutes the basic pattern that has to be worked upon in order for each woman to become who she is as a woman and a person.

It is always inadequate to make generalisations but yet generalisations provide a global picture that individual cases cannot reveal. My personal experience has convinced me that women in general have a deeper understanding of life than men and a more welcoming attitude to the stranger and the weaker. It ensues out of this better understanding an attitude which is more rooted in life and does not accept non-sense so easily. It is of course a general pattern; it does not mean that every woman evolves and behaves in conformity with this general pattern. Maturity plays also a role that creates another layer of differences between persons.

At this stage it is important to make a fundamental distinction: life appears and develops in the mother's womb but the mother is not the creator of this life; she is only the container or the support of this development and gets enriched in her own experience by the many stages and events that happen in her and with which she is in deep touch because they seem to be part of herself while remaining yet distinct from herself. At this stage a pernicious confusion may often happen that makes the mother consider her child as part of herself and as her own property or "product". This confusion negates the mysterious paradox in an event that happens in the deepest of the mother but remains yet distinct from her. This sadly possessive attitude denies the mystery of life that evolves independently of us as

parents and has many negative consequences on relationships or the development of the child later.

Yang or masculine qualities

Fatherhood is the expression of Yang that encompasses masculine qualities, providing structure, strength, leadership and expression.

The father cannot be involved in the process itself of forming life because this happens in a womb which he is not in direct touch with. Yet the experience involves him as much as the mother because he has to play a role that is equally important. While the mother is more in charge of what happens inside, he has traditionally to organise the outer setting that will provide anything that is needed for the security and the harmonious evolution of the process. It is his main role to create the external frame. This role is essential, especially in a hostile environment: enmity from other people, lack of food, water, shelter or average climatic conditions, etc. Of course this requirement seems much easier to satisfy in our modern society that provides a relative comfort but the struggle remains yet very similar to traditional conditions, although under different forms, when the father has to provide in a competitive context the minimum income that allows acquiring the resources and means that contribute to shape the right environment. He has to create the structure that will ensure the necessary comfort and the right quality of context and he has to foresee the circumstances of the near future and prepare how to face them. It is why his role is rather oriented towards the outer world. Work, in all its forms – i.e. not mainly as provider of income but as creator of a setting - becomes the evident means to provide the necessary resources.

More than receptivity, as it is the case for the woman, this role to create the structure requires from him mastery and ability to control, which are faculties that are connected with dominance, mainly dominance on material circumstances - that does not imply necessarily dominance over people. As the environment is essentially physical, he has to develop physical strength. Women develop, physically and mentally, more interiority (uterus) while men develop more exteriority (penis), in their body form as in their way to relate to others. While women develop endurance and resilience on a longer term, men learn to be quick in their action. Traditionally quick hunting is therefore more their skill while women specialise more into slow gathering of food or picking fruits. These are traditional roles that arise normally out of natural settings and forms of specialisation, without any hierarchy of values to be imposed onto them. This is the traditional pattern. This is only the pattern!

On the archetypal level, the creativity of men contrasts with the creativity of women. The former is more extraverted and concerns rather the quantity of elements that combine into shaping the environment while the latter is more introverted and concerns rather the quality of the small community where life happens in everyday life. From this fundamental difference culture has established a kind of law that intends to structure public life in assigning precise respective well-defined roles to women and men. Even if the original premises seem to be correct, these general laws are very often too radical and too narrow to allow a harmonious and personal development that would be free to reinterpret the many dimensions of life. We will see later how much we all suffer under the dictatorship of too rigid patterns and customs that generate deep pain for so many people: women first and children, but also for many men who are not comfortable with the current patterns. Stereotypes and wrong

practices make us all losers. We never stop needing to reinvent new patterns that are nearer to the essence of true life.

Although, as I have described, differences between men and women originated in their biological difference, it will be better suited to talk of these respective qualities as Yin and Yang qualities, i.e. as if they were not directly connected with gender. It is indeed striking how much the qualities I have described as feminine or masculine are in fact not absolutely linked with gender in a rigid way, even if they originated out of difference experiences that are narrowly related with gender. After arising they become indeed free qualities that everybody can develop. They become poles that influence our personal evolution and growth. They are indeed sorts of archetypes that impregnate our lives. We learn truly from one another by imitation.

Yin and Yang archetypes

Yin and Yang qualities rarely exist as such; they are poles of attraction of our behaviour or archetypes that impregnate our lives.

These concepts of Yin and Yang are well-known and the list of qualities that illustrate them is familiar although it is endless. I would like nevertheless to repeat here a short list of them and emphasise the antinomy between them by pairs.

Remember: they are archetypes for all people and not qualifiers for women or men!

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Yin

feminine
weakness
earth
obscure
water
humid
cold
internal
invisible
closed
right
slow
below
immobile
heavy
intuitive
receptive
etc.

Yang

masculine
strength
sky
clear
fire
dry
hot
external
visible
open
left
quick
above
mobile
light
rational
active
etc.

These qualities go by pairs of opposed natures as if they were incompatible. Yet they are meant to combine in order to provide the right equilibrium according to the ternary equation I have described earlier: the Yin, the Yang and the ever changing balance between them, in a never ending dance of dialogue and movement.

Poles and combinations

Yin and Yang are never pure; they appear always in combinations with their antagonistic feature. It is how equilibrium may arise.

Yin and Yang qualities are components of the whole. As archetypes they are a bit like antagonistic energies that animate the whole. When they combine, they create a form of balance between extremes.

In nature equilibrium is maintained by the action of contradictory forces that keep each other in check. This is a fundamental law of the universe we have too often tendency to forget. We all know by experience how it is difficult to keep physically or psychologically in balance. It is why nature has provided our bodies with muscles that work in contrary directions. The arm has one muscle at the front and one muscle at the back which are both active when the arm moves and both act in contradiction one with another, each one moderating the other or compensating the excesses of the other. Balance is established by very minute movements of contradictory effects that combine. Observe how you walk. If you do so while walking very slowly, you will notice how many minute incoherent interactions of many muscles are involved which create at the end a continuous movement although it is made out of the succession of an infinity of movements that do not make sense when considered in isolation.

We can observe the same law in social settings; the interaction of diverse persons allow to find a balance that is usually healthier than when the group is controlled by one leader only. Democracy works at its best when many parties are involved and create a form of dialog between many tendencies. The most evolved composition allows the balance to be kept while each specific force finds its own expression without dominating the others and without being censured.

This is the law of extremes that combine. This is the way Yin and Yang archetypes combine in a form of cohabitation that offers a synthesis of contradictory trends according to the ternary equation of the three factors of Yin, Yang and ever changing balance.

Now we have to notice that Yin and Yang archetypes are nothing else than poles of influences. They are like poles of attraction that define a kind of magnetic field around them and shape their environment. When we move between these poles we find a middle-way that results out of these many different and often contradictory influences, in a field where opposite attractions find a dynamic balance (the third factor of the equation). The archetypes are the components and our life is the synthesis of their respective influences combined with our choices. Archetypes work like vectors in physics, i.e. like forces illustrated by arrows that are defined by their strength and their orientation. One can identify each of them but the consequent force is the resultant that combines all of them. If one single vector (component) changes, the resultant changes as well.

In our rational world we have the tendency to live in closed circles where we protect ourselves from the influences of external agents. This simplifies our life because we know well our small internal world but it makes it so much poorer. When we dare to live in an open setting, we open also ourselves to the influence of diverse forces (many vectors) and our resulting life (resultant) becomes richer. If we wish to enrich our lives, it is certainly very helpful to think in terms of many influences that shape us instead of belonging to a closed paddock with limited habits. The world can be understood as a complex field of many influencing poles or as a juxtaposition of well protected and closed paddocks. We are free to decide whether we want to live in an open field under the influence of many poles or imprisoned in hermetic closed pre-established settings.

Yin and Yang archetypes work in any case according to the pattern of opposed poles. If we play according to the rules of this open game we can be enriched by the complex and complementary influences of

these many poles. We learn to be more feminine and masculine at the same time. We learn to live in the antinomy between both antagonistic components.

Aptitudes and attitudes

Yang is rather shown in aptitudes (skills or abilities to act) while Yin is rather shown in attitudes (ways of being or understanding).

Once we have understood how Yin and Yang foster our lives as poles of influences, we can better describe a few constant characteristics of femininity and masculinity. It is evidently dangerous to try to do so because nobody fits perfectly with the model. Yet it remains a common generality that is never valid but always more or less true nevertheless! The following description is based on a workshop of an intercultural group composed of women and men from Asia (China, India, Thailand), Africa (Algeria, Benin, Congo, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Morocco), South America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay) and Europe³. Although from different genders and different cultures and languages, the participants agreed about the following list of qualifiers for women and men, as being a way to describe the fundamental difference between the two genders.

feminine . masculine

introvert . extravert

cyclic . linear

tenderness . eroticism

psychological resistance . physical strength

interest for the body . lack of knowledge of it

3 Published by Intercultural North-South Network, 174 rue Joseph II, Bruxelles.

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intuitive intelligence . rational intelligence
cooperative . competitive
self-criticism then self-defence . self-defence then self-criticism
need to provide security . need to provide order
power used to connect . power used to control
conflict: relational approach . conflict: structural approach
strategy to avoid the unbearable . strategy oriented towards aim
gentle adaptation to change . precise and focused action
self-limitation . overstepping limits
sacrifice for loved ones . one's life as ideal
guided by experience . interest in theory
no non-sense . discrepancy talk – behaviour
search for recognition:
through charity work . through material / political success

It is evidently a generalisation that tries to describe an average pattern that is never valid in its pure expression. Yet the generalisation makes good sense as one may observe in this list. This list may otherwise be compared with the previous one that concerned the Yin and Yang qualities that are evidently narrowly related.

Out of this description a fundamental difference between femininity and masculinity emerges that emphasises a contrast between the way of being of women and the need for action of men. Men seem to rather base their behaviour on skills and aptitudes while women tend rather to adopt attitudes. Masculinity is more to be found in action and doing while femininity is more to be found in attention and being. This is a very important difference that also shows the complementarity of these two poles: we need attention as much as action. We need doing as much as being. One is impossible without the other.

Attitudes seem to be rather passive. They define a form of understanding through observation. They generate awareness that is the grounding of our behaviour. Our whole way of life is geared by the way we look at things, at circumstances and at life in general. It means that the apparent passivity of attitudes reveals itself to be very powerful as it leads our whole life. Observation, understanding and awareness mean also discernment and acceptance. As an attitude that does not immediately act, it gives space for welcoming and caring. Femininity creates a space for acceptance.

On the contrary aptitudes are rather focused on action, on adapting the environment to what is perceived as necessary. It is rather outward oriented and tends to control or dominate and to master circumstances. It is evident that the previous quality of attitude will orientate the whole quality of the action. It is why in a certain way feminine qualities of attitudes are rather at the source of masculine forms of action and expression.

Aptitudes and attitudes are not characterised by the same qualities and levels of impact. Aptitudes, because they are linked with action, are generally impacting more strongly and physically on our environment than attitudes, although attitudes are in a certain way the truly fostering factors as they constitute the real source of aptitudes because they define how these qualities are applied and in consequence the quality of the action. An attitude of anger will generate a rather aggressive action, while a peaceful attitude will generate a gentler act. In this way we can observe how masculinity often dominates femininity when action is not open to the source that inspires it. This form of domination of masculinity over femininity has to be understood rather because of the deep nature of their respective essences as expressions of Yin and Yang energies, and not because of a conscious intention for domination and oppression. This

is a very important point I will come back to later because it needs to be much more deeply investigated.

Competition, dominance and cooperation

After defining the nature of each of these two components that are femininity and masculinity, we have to investigate how they relate to one another.

The threat of the power of giving birth

The feminine power of giving birth is perceived by masculinity as subversive because it creates life and develops in a hidden place.

At first glance this statement seems to be a non-sense. One wonders what can be subversive in giving birth. Yet, as a man, I am convinced that the mysterious power of shaping life and giving birth is perceived by men in general as a tremendous power that remains covered by mystery. One does not control what emerges suddenly out of a hidden place after months of slow preparation. I am also sure that women consider in general their own power of giving birth as a mysterious aptitude that completely escapes their own control. But it remains nevertheless theirs or seems to be theirs. Once again it is evident that the emergence of life in the woman's womb is not a power that the woman creates; it is indeed something that happens in her without her being able to master it. Yet the whole perception of this mysterious dimension of the phenomenon - whether by women or by men - is more explained by the exterior appearances than by the real interior hidden reality of what happens truly in the womb.

In other words something mysterious happens that cannot be controlled and that brings tremendous changes. It is a hidden power that is evidently at the core of the mystery of life. Therefore women are perceived by men as carriers of this incredible power of creating life. On top of that, it happens in a hidden place where nobody has access to. Is that not for any form of power what one would call subversion?

Of course it is not. Yet life has always been perceived as out of control and every social organisation seems to try to bring order into what seems to go beyond what is tolerable. This does not mean that social order always represses life. It shows only that we are all fundamentally afraid of what seems powerful and out of our control and that this arising life may be perceived as a surprise and a changing factor in our perception of security.

The factor of envy is not absent either. The principal question that probably most fathers ask themselves (at least I did) - mainly unconsciously - seems to be: how does it feel like to have a distinct form of life growing in one's womb? how does it feel to be participant in giving shape to a new independent being? Of course fathers may observe what happens but they remain nevertheless outsiders because they are not directly in touch with the sensations and direct perceptions of all aspects of the process. This sense of exclusion is evidently a major frustration concerning an essential aspect and fundamental experience of life: the mystery of its origin.

This first consideration concerns the rather physical and experimental aspects of the process, but it can be extended to the more symbolical dimension that concerns the deeper significance of such exclusion. Deep in ourselves we are all (women and men) afraid of what arises in a hidden place. Fairy tales are full of stories where children (it

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means us) are afraid of darkness, of forests, of deep water, etc. that symbolise the unconscious. The womb is itself a hidden place, as the seat of our unconscious where feelings and drives arise that we do not control. Gestation and birth symbolise metaphorically these hidden movements that control us beyond what we would like to be. They constitute the hidden and secret dimensions of our own life, i.e. the aspects we do not master properly and that we fear because we do not know where they will lead us. This is the symbolical aspect of our own uncontrolled energies.

Beyond that aspect of the unconscious there is also the threat which the hidden energies that develop in the other can represent for ourselves. The father feels puzzled by the mysterious energies that are in action in his own partner. How many men feel threatened by the more interior and intuitive energies that animate their own feminine partner? Beyond motherhood, interiority has always been a challenge for rationality. Here again we find a contrast we have described between Yin and Yang when the energies of femininity seem rather be acting in the hidden place. It is why they adopt this appearance of being subversive. Whether at the level of partnership between a man and a woman or at a more social collective pattern, anything that happens as hidden is always perceived as a danger. Intuition is a danger for rationality, freedom of spirit is perceived as a menace for social order, mysticism is seen as subversive for official religion, etc. Life seems to be fostered by what we fear the most: these powerful energies that arise in ourselves or our partners and that transform the strict regular and controlled order of organised living, thinking, searching, doing, etc.

In a few words: life is subversive because it is unexpected. Life is Love, i.e. a tremendous energy that leads us where we do not want to

go sometimes. Shall we resist it or shall we let us be driven by this energy for the sole reason that it is life?

Strength and resilience

Masculinity is linked with strength and control of external conditions. It dominates resilience (Yin) that is an inner hidden force.

I described earlier how the role of the father consists in providing the external conditions for the safety of the family and how it allows masculinity to develop strength: physical strength and power for control and mastery, i.e. dominance.

On the other hand motherhood calls for endurance and it is why women develop a great ability for resilience. In difficult conditions men are generally capable of great acts of courage and strength but it is a quick reaction that is meant to have a strong impact. The reaction of women in dire conditions is usually characterised by a powerful resistance to harsh conditions on a longer term. Women resist usually better cold and hunger than men. Resilience is the faculty to last despite hostile conditions. This is the hidden force that allows inner resistance when everything seems to be destructive.

This means that both genders have different ways of coping with adversity and develop different modes of reaction. Here again the masculine reaction is characterised by its external power (rapidity and strength) while women show more inner resistance (long term and resilience).

It is easy to see how the masculine power for external strength can dominate the inner feminine power of resilience. Both powers remain

untouched but nevertheless one may easily dominate the other. Despite their own respective powers that appear to be of equal potentials, they distinguish themselves from one another by the fact that the former dominates more easily the latter, although it is precisely the capacity of women for resilience that makes them so strong to resist power.

Control and dominance vs life and subversion

Sense of exclusion, fear of the subversive power of life and dominance translate the need of masculinity to control femininity.

The description of femininity and masculinity I have tried to draw so far intends to show that masculine and feminine natures and their ensuing potentials are not of the same nature and, because of this disparity, one has tendency to dominate the other. This tendency is itself also of double nature: it relies first on the fear that life imposes onto us as an energy that cannot be mastered easily and it expresses secondly through the control of masculine strength over feminine resilience. This is the core of the message. It is important to understand that this message does not describe a war between men and women but it describes an inner conflict in our deeper being between the deep energy of life that animates us and the fear it creates in us when we feel overwhelmed by this inner power; and we choose the easiest way to control it in repressing its creativity in order to channel it instead of accepting the challenge in a more open way.

In other words, when we face the mysterious energy of life that arises in us, we have rather the tendency to choose the easiest way of external power for control and dominance of this energy we do not know too well instead of choosing to let this subversive energy

express itself freely although it could teach us how to live a more complete and broader life. We prefer control and security over freedom and risk.

Masculinity (Yang energy) expresses here our general preference for mastery over vitality while femininity (Yin energy) expresses the “subversive” power of what we do not know really because it is mysterious and has to do with the deep essence of life and the true vocation of our destiny. It is important to see that the choice between these two energies remains ours and that the terms of the choice are not as black and white as it is presented here. My description concerns only the archetypes of the two poles of black and white, of Yang and Yin that are meant to combine. Remember that these two antagonistic energies are meant to combine because they are never complete and never pure, and their balance can only exist if they combine. It means that our personal choice in developing both masculine and feminine qualities in different proportions consists in fact in finding our own personal balance (third term) between these two energies when they generate at the same time the two antagonistic forces of subversion and control. Balance is, here again, provided by two antagonistic “muscles”.

The easiest way consists for us in controlling the subversive energy of life, yet, although it is the most secure response, it is certainly not the richest possibility. We have then to find the balance we truly want between these two antagonistic poles.

Mary and John the Baptist

Femininity means understanding, i.e. deepening of the meaning of life; masculinity means expression, i.e. acting out of this mystery.

The gender experience

The Christian tradition proposes in the persons of Mary, mother of Jesus, and John the Baptist, the prophet who prepares the path of Jesus, a fascinating myth that explains very well how masculinity and femininity relate one with another and how they are necessary partners that complement each other. Even it states that they cannot be one without the other. My purpose in introducing here these two persons and the concepts they support, which are taken out of the Christian teaching, is not to go into theology but to remain on the level of archetypes and to speak in terms of myths. The myths have a powerful ability to express what words are too narrow to say. Fairy tales have indeed the incredible power to teach what the mechanisms of life are in their deeper meaning. The stories for instance of small children daring to confront the darkness of deep forests tell us about the way we face the energies of our unconscious. That is also what myths do. The myth of Oedipus tells us about the relationships between sons and fathers or mothers. The myth of Sisyphus tells about the never ending of effort. And so on. It is what I'm risking here myself into when I mention Mary and John as paradigm of attitudes that have to do with our topic of masculinity and femininity.

First, before I explain anything about the symbolism expressed by this myth, let's remember the story, i.e. only the facts without their deeper meaning. Mary, a poor girl of the Jewish tradition receives the visit of an angel who tells her that she will give birth to a son who is the incarnation of God. This means dishonour for her as she is not married. Yet she accepts to become the instrument of what is explained to her as the salvation of mankind. In her humility she remains open to the unknown and to the unexpected because she trusts life and God to lead her on the path of truth. On the other hand, John the Baptist is this enigmatic character who lives a very rough life of extreme simplicity, in the desert feeding on grasshoppers and wild honey. He becomes the teacher of crowds by becoming the sign

that prepares the path of the Lord, the future Jesus. He is a channel of expression but the content of the message is not his. He is aware that the content is what is dictated to him and that his role is only to make this message understandable to the crowds. Humbly he recognises this role as his vocation that requires from him to remain hardly visible in order to make the divine more perceptible.

It is not important here whether one believes in these two stories or not. What matters so far is the meaning of what these stories try to teach us. The main issue is not about historical facts but about the meaning of life, or more exactly about what matters most in life and how it works. We are called to understand the message not because we have to become good believers but because it will help us to be in tune with life and therefore to be able to live it to the full instead of struggling against it, i.e. living in illusions and putting all of our energy into what leads us into a dead end. It is essential to see that the myth in its deeper meaning is meant to reveal us the truth and bring us in harmony with the energy of life.

So now, beyond the story, let's try to perceive the deeper meaning of the myth. In Eastern Orthodox symbolism Mary and John represent the feminine and masculine archetypes and more especially how they need each other to be complete. Both archetypes or genders are complementary.

Mary is the symbol of the one who accepts what happens to her. She is completely open to the deep mystery of what arises in her and lets it take shape. By letting this unknown form of life develop in herself she gets enriched and discovers the deep meaning of life. As I just explained, true religion is not about beliefs and superstitions to be imposed onto us but about the deeper meaning and the true essence of life. If we receive the message and understand what it tries to

explain to us, we will be able to better cope with life and we will make better use of it, instead of wasting our energy in an antagonistic resistance to life's own dynamic. Mary is in this sense the archetype of femininity, i.e. of this ability to open to the mystery (subversive energy) that arises deep in ourselves and that teaches us about the meaning and essence of life. It tells us that the life that takes its source deep in ourselves (the divine) is the true force that makes us free. We have to trust this energy that shapes and guides us.

On the other hand, John the Baptist, as the other pole that is the necessary complement to this form of understanding, is the symbol of the expression of this deeper truth. He is in the story the one who teaches the others about the message of what true life is. His role is important: first, this message about the meaning of life needs to be heard and understood by the feminine ability to listen; it is what Mary does indeed. But it is not enough: it has still to be expressed and enacted. John the Baptist is the one who explains to the crowd what life is about. He is not only the teacher in the sense that he tells people with words what they have to understand and what they need to see but he is also the person who enacts the teaching and incarnates it by remaining the trustful and humble man he is. He is playing a central role and many people take him for the Messiah but he denies this interpretation and shows how the Liberator (true Life) comes from beyond him. He is also practising what he says. He is therefore in both ways (teaching and practice) the symbol, the archetype, of the energy of expression.

It is evident that these two paradigms of Mary and John are complementary. One cannot exist without the other. There is no real expression without meaning. And meaning can be truly perceived only if it can be expressed. Hidden meanings remain inaccessible, therefore like inexistent.

In short, Mary understands because she is receptive, and John expresses this meaning because it has been taught to him. These two powers of understanding (femininity) and expression (masculinity) combine as the Yin and the Yang do. Our personal balance consists in finding the right equilibrium in this equation. We have to move on the axis between the two extreme poles of masculinity (extreme expression without content) and femininity (extreme understanding without expression).

The myth of the Garden of Eden

Two ways: either stealing the fruit, or following the path of our own growth, that allows in us the marriage of feminine and masculine.

The book of Genesis in the Bible tells us about the Garden of Eden. This is, here again, another myth that tells us the unfathomable about life. The myth of Eden has been too often interpreted as a moral teaching about good and evil. It is important to understand that the myth of the Garden of Eden tries to tell us much more because it teaches us, when we intend to discover what life is in its essence, about what is true authentic growth for ourselves by opposition to what can attract us but is indeed an illusion.

The traditional story of the fall of man (the story of Adam, Eve, the snake and the apple in Genesis) has too often been interpreted as a moral tale about the dualistic distinction of good (obedience to the law) and evil (disobedience) as two equivalent forces (God and Satan as being equal). This is the simplified popular version which is far from being complete. It is even a very misleading interpretation.

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In contrast with this popular version the true meaning of this deep teaching proposes indeed a path of liberation which consists of a process of personal or collective accomplishment where we learn to explore our inner world and to marry our feminine and masculine faculties. Let's examine these two versions in more detail.

1) According to the popular version the tale of Genesis is understood in a moralistic and pessimistic way: as human beings, we are bad and we have all the time the tendency to disobey because Satan (the snake) seduces us. Nevertheless God comes and saves us by wiping off the blackboard where our sins are registered. This fate never changes and we are condemned to the everlasting repetition of this scenario. God and Satan seem to be two equivalent forces which oppose each other. This sad understanding can only generate a deep sense of destructive guilt.

2) But another understanding⁴ is possible, which brings life and hope; according to this second interpretation this tale does not oppose a woman and a man as two distinct people but it describes our personal evolution or more exactly an inner path from an non-accomplished to an accomplished state, from a Yin to a Yang state:

- Yin: it is the feminine principle (the woman in the tale) which is not the evil as the popular explanation describes it, but which is the symbol of water, of inertia; the darkness means the non-accomplished, not as evil but as what still did not become light. This is the womb of our origin, the interiority, the source which has not yet been revealed and has to be expressed.

- Yang: it is the masculine principle (the man in the tale) which is not the good but which is the symbol of dryness, of expression; the light means the accomplished, as what has found its own expression. This is the mature state of our own accomplishment in the expression of our vocation.

Of course, we have all, men and women, both aspects in us, independently of our gender; we are at the same time Yin or feminine - i.e. the womb, the origin, the non-accomplished - and Yang or masculine - i.e. the arrow, the expression, on the way to be accomplished. We are all called, men as well as women, to search for our darkness in ourselves in order to bring it to light and then, after maturation, to expression. From an immature non-accomplished being, in our own womb, we have to grow and come to expression in accomplishing our vocation. In a poetic and symbolic way Genesis describes how, in the beginning before the Creation, there is only the indistinct world of water and darkness which has to come to expression. "Let there be light, and there was light" writes Genesis. This coming into light is the process of creation and of revelation. Light reveals what was not yet manifested. Life is in this way our natural move towards light and expression.

According to this second interpretation the snake of the tale can be understood as our life energy (our kundalini) which helps the non-accomplished to become accomplished. It is neither good nor bad as such. It is simply our energy of growth and its quality depends on what it concentrates upon and how it is used and implemented. The tale tells us that there is in fact only one path: the path of our descent into our interiority, in order to embrace our own darkness and to bring it into light as a form of healing of our depth and as a marriage of our feminine and masculine principles. This path is a long path of

⁴ See the work (mainly in French) of Annick de Souzenelle: *La parole au coeur du corps*, Albin Michel, 1993. Or *Le symbolisme du corps humain*, Dangles, 1984.

maturation and of inner transformation; this process is certainly not easy but it is necessary to access life.

Yet an illusory shortcut exists, as the tale of Genesis describes it, which consists in avoiding the slow and painful path of inner growth: under the influence of our inner energy, which urges us to reach quickly the end of the path, - i.e. under the influence of our own snake whose energy has been side-tracked - we choose a shortcut which consists in stealing the fruit of knowledge (the result) before we have endured the path of growth (the process); it means that we try to get the fruit (the apple) without undergoing the process of growth described above. In doing so, we prevent knowledge to grow in us by slow assimilation through the process of life and inner transformation; only an illusory form of knowledge will be reached by a violent act of false appropriation. The marriage of the femininity and masculinity (unity) does not happen. We remain split (two).

By opposition to the traditional version, this second interpretation of the tale shows redemption as the normal progression on the path of life. It reveals to us how our own growth gives us access to life when we undergo the normal process of inner transformation. According to this new understanding we are saved from the illusion of the shortcut. Redemption happens once for ever and is not subjected to the infernal circle of repetition as according to the first interpretation.

In summary the tale of Genesis, according to this second interpretation, tells us that there are two paths for accessing knowledge:

- 1) The first path accepts the laws of the universe which help us to grow through a long maturation process in unity with the whole Creation, knowing that the sacred force of life is the only energy

which can help us to become ourselves in the expression of our vocation when we remain open to it. It gives us access to the Tree of Life.

- 2) The second path breaks its links with the Creation and chooses a risky individual illusory shortcut while it tries by force to appropriate oneself the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which will for ever remain exterior because it cannot be assimilated through the process of self-transformation that is the only way of integration.

It is fascinating to see how the way of growth goes beyond dualism and is rooted in the essential movement of life which has certainly to overcome resistance but has yet no main antagonist. On the contrary, the way of the shortcut is based on, and imprisoned in, the dualism of good and evil as two opposed and equivalent energies, which they are not indeed.

A humorous story by Tony de Mello tells the same: A lady goes into a shop and asks: "what do you sell?". God, who stands behind the counter, answers: "we sell everything you could desire!" The lady then orders: "I would like justice, peace and love in unlimited quantities, please!" But God replies: "Oh my Dear, there is a terrible misunderstanding! We do not sell fruits, we sell only seeds!"

The tale of Genesis opposes similarly the way of the seed which grows through a long process of self-transformation and the way of the stolen fruit. The description of the path of the growing seed is a powerful teaching in what concerns our relationship with nature and the whole universe. It opens us to a new form of integration into the cosmos; the growing of the seed invites us to this inner transformation which brings us in harmony with the universe, according to the wisdom of traditional cultures, instead of leading us

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into an illusory domination which needs absolutely to transform the external surroundings to the limit of destruction according to the folly of our western civilisation.

If we reinterpret now this myth in terms of feminine and masculine, we see that we have to combine both the life that arises unprocessed in the deep of our inner being (Mary) and have to bring it to expression out of ourselves in order to contribute to the general process of creation that happens in the universe, in nature and in our social surroundings (John the Baptist). We have to discover the means how to marry our femininity with our masculinity. Neither of them is a threat for the other. Only in their right combination they can bring true life to expression. Right and true: this is the challenge of our own personal and collective life. How do we do that?

Dominant and recessive

By analogy with biology, masculinity may be said to be a dominant character and feminine a recessive one. Yet they are both essential.

Genetics describes how genes combine with genes. Mendel is famous for having established the main fundamental laws concerning how the genes received from the two parents may combine to give shape to a new being that has common characters with its two parents but nevertheless remains unique. It has been observed that there are dominant and recessive genes. This is what will interest us here because it is narrowly related with our topic of femininity and masculinity.

First it is important to notice that the mechanisms in genetics are much more complex than what I want to retain from this example. What we learn here and which can be useful to better understand

what happens in the interaction of Yin and Yang is the following. In genetics there are dominant and recessive characters. Dominant characters are characters that overrule recessive ones. When a character inherited from the father has to combine with a character inherited from the mother, a law of composition defines what happens. It is not pure chance. For instance, if the parents have both blue eyes, the child will have blue eyes, but if the parents have both brown eyes, the child will have most probably brown eyes but it may also happen that the child will have blue eyes. The fact (in its simplified version) is in this case that blue is recessive while brown is dominant. It means that a character received from the mother, if it is recessive (blue), needs to combine with a similar one (blue also) received from the father to give the same recessive character (blue) to the child. If both characters inherited from the parents are different (one blue, the other brown) the dominant (brown) will overrule the recessive (blue) and the child will have brown eyes. It means that the character blue of the child is made of two blue ones (one from each parent) while the character brown can be made of one blue and one brown or of two brown ones. Each parent has to give one of his / her own characters. 1) They can give only a blue one (recessive) if they have both blue eyes because their own gene will be made of two blue ones and the child will have blue eyes. 2) Or only a brown one (dominant) if they have both brown ones and the child will have brown eyes. 3) But they can give either a blue (recessive) or a brown (dominant) if they have both one of each (blue or brown). If they have one of each, they have brown eyes but nevertheless, if both give a blue one (recessive), the child will have blue eyes even if the parents have brown eyes. It means in summary that a recessive character can only be transmitted if both parents give a recessive character while the combination of different characters will give a dominant character.

If we compare these complex laws of genetics with the laws that rule more or less (in a much less strict way) how Yin and Yang combine, we can observe something very similar. Most Yin qualities appear to be recessive when they combine with Yang ones or more exactly Yin qualities can only thrive well when the Yang correspondent remains minimum. It does not mean that they disappear completely when the Yang component is dominant but it means that they are overruled and no more so visible. Like the blue eye gene the Yin recessive can still be present but it remains invisible or unexpressed in a certain way. This is of course only a comparison and not an absolute law as it is the case in genetics.

The best example of a Yin quality that is recessive is silence that can only exist when there is no noise. Any noise will destroy silence because noise is dominant and silence is recessive. Silence will still be there but unable to be perceived. The same can be said about cold and hot. Cold water can only remain cold when no heat is added to it. War destroys peace. Hurry prevents slowness. Competition hinders cooperation. Fear goes against love. Light penetrates darkness. Rationality kills intuition.

Yet we can also express these simple truths in a different way when we express them in the reversed way that will emphasise the very precious quality of the Yin component that has to be protected precisely because it is recessive. Silence creates a space of reception that noise prevents from existing. Cold quietens down excitement and maintains calm. Peace creates a space where conflicts can be solved. Slowness provides time to enjoy and perceive the depth of life. Cooperation helps complementarity to find expression beyond simplistic competition for the same thing. Love generates trust that is a powerful antidote against fear. Darkness keeps the mystery alive

and is a protection against simplistic representations. Intuition enriches the ability to process rationally what has been perceived.

In these many examples and in their double formulations we can clearly see how the Yin qualities are recessive and how much their expression must be protected if we do not want to lose them. It means also that Yang trends must be restrained in order to leave more space for Yin qualities. This is the main message of this teaching about the recessive character of Yin qualities. This protection can only happen if there is clear awareness of what they contribute to. It is why the assessment that feminine qualities (Yin) can be said to be recessive and masculine qualities (Yang) to be dominant will change deeply the way we understand life and how we practise it.

It is important to see clearly that, beyond the dominant and the recessive qualities, there is the third factor of the right balance. This third factor is the protected space that embraces the two opposite factors and combines them in a harmonious way. Yin and Yang can only harmoniously combine when this necessary protected space is created that allows the recessive character to express itself and marry with the dominant character without being annihilated by it.

Control, oppression and protection

The antinomy between Yin and Yang opens five different ways: control, exploitation, repression, self-restraint or cultivation.

I have described so far how femininity (Yin) is linked with the source of life and how it is therefore threatening because it is unexpected and subversive. It is the unaccomplished that needs to grow, to be processed and expressed. It is also the recessive dimension of life that needs to be protected in order to be perceived and expressed

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properly. Feminine and masculine attitudes and aptitudes are antinomic but they need each other to be fully expressing themselves, it means they need to take care of each other in order to maintain the right balance that is the most favourable for each of them to be fully growing and being expressed.

This is the general precept I want to prove right. Yet life is not so simple and things develop differently from what we intend it to. In our real life we can see how we behave in contradiction with this precept because other aspects or reactions intervene that are stronger. It is evident in our western society that femininity is not allowed to express itself fully. The women's liberation movement has struggled powerfully to have the cause of women recognised. It did a fantastic job but it reinforced also wrong perceptions when it explained the confrontation of Yin and Yang as a conflict between women and men. It is evidently true in many cases but it is certainly not the main cause of oppression of femininity by masculinity. When one sees the challenge of the women's liberation movement in the context of an antinomy between Yin and Yang, the feminine issue takes another shape and can be answered differently.

The antinomy between femininity (Yin) and masculinity (Yang) opens different ways of behaviour, whether personal or collective, that reveal the different levels of adaptation.

The first level is probably the level of fear as I have already described it earlier. The unknown power of what matures in the womb, the unknown new life, is perceived as a threat because it is out of our control and will evidently bring new powerful changes in our life. This can be understood literally for parents when a child will soon be born; it can also be understood metaphorically when it is about the deeper meaning of life that we do not know and which reveals to us

what we have not still understood. This is the myth of Mary that shows how life is unfathomable and always creating surprises; it says also that, if we accept to be surprised and to change our way of life, we will discover a much deeper and meaningful way of life.

The fear of life and of its deeper meaning can generate, in different ways, either a wish to control or a wish to exploit or a wish to repress.

- 1) The first reaction, control, is the softest reaction against the mystery when one does not accept it but also does not repress it completely. One tries just to channel it in order to make it acceptable and manageable. Control will of course unconsciously deny the mysterious dimension of life but it does not need to repress or destroy it; it is happy just controlling, i.e. just keeping the flow between dams. By doing so it deprives life of its unexpected dimensions and prevents it from flowing naturally. The river is completely transformed, in its essence. It is like damming a wild river. The water continues to flow but the flow has nothing any more in common with what it was originally or is meant to be. We can use it, master it, but it has lost its own essence and mystery. It is tamed and therefore half dead, yet there is no conscious intention of killing it.
- 2) The second reaction to fear, exploitation, proceeds as we do with nature. We destroy it because we want to suck the whole substance out of it and use it for our purpose. We refuse to consider that it is more than a resource to exploit. We want just to grab it. Yet it is much more than this simple resource because life is a flow one cannot master or dam. Life is not just about taking but it is a whole balance how we accept to be taken by the flow. There is first the compulsion to grab and to possess but it may also develop further into a frenzy of sucking the living substance

out of the one who is in touch with life and has access to the deeper mystery. This way of sucking the living substance is then a form of parasitism that happens especially when the sucker feels empty and dead and wants to steal life from his victim. That happens a lot between males and females when the dominant male uses his partner as an object out of which he gets pleasure or knowledge or even just the quintessence of the experience of life. This is done of course without respect for the female being who is used as an object. Grabbing and exploiting, whether with nature or with women, constitute a form of rape that just takes what is seen as valuable, leaving the main essence unconsidered, although often deeply damaged if not destroyed. Rape of nature and rape of women are of the same essence: they deny both the entity of the one that is raped. They objectify the other. Rape is not only physical; it can be on a more subtle level, psychological, emotional, intellectual or spiritual.

- 3) The third reaction to fear is repression. When the deeper understanding of life becomes threatening, we have the tendency to repress the source that expresses the challenging truth. Femininity in this way is often perceived as too subtle and too sensitive to, and aware of, the many complex dimensions of life. Mothers are trained naturally to perceive what is and to accept it in order to better answer the needs of the ones they have to care for. This form of acceptance and openness is threatening for the establishment. It is perceived as subversive. Repression of femininity is always in action around us. We create noise not to hear silence. We rush in order to escape slowness and boredom. We want to accumulate wealth because life, without controlling it through its material dimensions, seems too mysterious and too unbearable to handle. This form of repression is one of the dominant characteristics of our modern society in its attempt to repress life in the egg and to make it more manageable when it

has been simplified, i.e. reduced to a much simpler expression than what it is truly; and we can then better master this simplified version by denying the mysterious dimension of its full essence. It is a dominant trend of our society to proceed to the slow destruction of life through very neutral and insignificant attitudes. There is then no major act of killing but nevertheless each act has this aftertaste of unconscious repression. This kind of innocent killing translates further into for instance our fear from strangers or refugees, our fear from what does not resemble what we know or are accustomed to. We take in this way constantly refuge into well-known behaviours and values. We live imprisoned in this frame of conventional wisdom that dictates us the suitable behaviour before we have time to reflect more deeply about it. Modern life has created a rigid frame that solves our problems without us having to take a stand; we accept to compromise with what is imposed because we find too tiresome to take our own stand, knowing that it will cost us a lot.

If we do not succumb to fear in one of these three forms I describe, we can then behave in a more creative way and leave more space for the expression of femininity in our lives. This can be done on two further degrees.

- 4) Beyond fear the first degree is just self-restraint. When we become aware that femininity is a recessive quality, we care for it to be protected and to be more fully expressed. It means that we moderate our Yang tendencies in order to leave more space for Yin qualities to arise. We restrain our desire for noise because silence allows inspiration to come to the forth. We restrain our need for speed because slowness offers a better perception of what happens. We reduce our material needs because it creates more space for spiritual perceptions to take shape. We do less

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because we believe that being is a more essential dimension of life and that excess of action prevents too often a deeper awareness of being. Self-restraint, in one word, creates a protected space where feminine qualities may arise. Self-restraint is like a wall that protects this space against the intrusion of more masculine qualities. It does not mean that these Yang (masculine) qualities are negative but this protective attitude ensues out of an awareness that they are too imposing because of their dominant nature, by opposition to the recessive character of Yin (feminine) qualities.

- 5) The next degree that allows feminine qualities to thrive is, more than self-restraint and protection, the conscious cultivation of these feminine qualities that are recessive. It means that we organise our lives in order to cultivate consciously these Yin seeds in order to allow them to bear fruit. For instance it is perceived that it is not enough to protect silence but it is also good to practise meditation to allow oneself to experience personally and discover the depth of silence. It is also the choice of renouncing the use of cars and planes because one chooses to practise slowness in all of its aspects. Such choices are evidently personal choices that allow each one to orient their own life according to personal preferences defined by an awareness of the necessity not only to protect but also to cultivate feminine attitudes. This choice for careful cultivation and attention may also be extended to social and collective choices met by the local community when these feminine values are recognised collectively as a treasure the community has to protect and cultivate. Of course a necessary consensus has to arise to make this collective choice a real condition for local community life.

Abortion of the feminine

Paradoxically a major characteristic of our modern society is that we give priority to Yang dominant values over Yin recessive ones.

I have described so far how feminine qualities are recessive and how they need to be protected or even cultivated in order to survive and not to be squashed by antinomic masculine ones. The picture I try to depict here cannot be complete if the aspect of our own unconscious preferences is not mentioned. These rather hidden preferences encompass certainly our ability to not react in a fearsome and repressive way when confronted to Yin qualities but they go much further because we can notice how the surrounding culture of our modern society has taught us to give indeed our preferences to Yang behaviours over Yin attitudes. This is a very important aspect of our modern life and maybe even of our basic human nature, independently of our culture, that we tend to constantly underestimate: we need to become aware how much our culture or human nature orients us towards preferably Yang behaviours. Not only we are afraid of feminine qualities because they appear subversive to us and full of a mystery that we do not want to confront, not only we do not want to practise self-restraint and we refuse to cultivate consciously feminine qualities but, on top of that, we deliberately choose what reinforces the masculine trends of our personal life and of our social behaviour. Whether women or men, i.e. completely indifferently of our gender, we feel attracted by masculine values such as speed, action, accumulation of wealth, domination of our neighbours, desire to show off and to impose ourselves. All these preferences show that we give priority to masculine values at the cost of feminine qualities; and this tendency is equally present in women as in men.

As I already said, speed negates slowness, noise destroys silence, etc. It means that each time I prefer speed to slowness I not only give priority to a masculine value but I also cut short the possibility of a feminine quality to arise and to teach us about the mystery of life. I choose speed and I reach quickly my destination but this choice has made me blind to the diversity of landscapes and people and impressions on the way. The Yin qualities of receptivity have been cancelled by too much greed for masculine power of control and domination.

As I just described it earlier, oppression of women by men happens when a “dead” man attempts to suck the living substance out of his partner (rape) or when any oppressor tries to destroy what is alive in order not to be disturbed or threatened any more by a form of living challenge and remorse of not being alive. This is already a terrible assessment of what we are capable to do as human beings to other human beings. But, on top of that, we also deliberately choose to work with the dominating power. We are not this dominating power, which consists in human power of control and domination, but we make alliance with it in order to impose our own superiority. And we do that indifferently, whether we are men or women. Men and women make alliance with the dominating power of masculinity in order to repress femininity and not to leave any space for its expression. It seems extreme to affirm that but a detached observation of our daily behaviour will soon prove how it is true.

This is a terrible perception of what happens truly which is probably much worse than a direct and visible oppression of one gender by the other. This extremely ambiguous situation explains why the struggle for the equality of genders goes much beyond what happens in family or between people of opposed genders. It concerns the core itself of our culture and of everything we do.

This unconscious form of collaboration with domination explains also a fascinating mystery: if oppression were only the fact of the domination of men over women, how could one explain that women do not rebel? Are they stupid sheep that accept to be lead to the slaughter house? Of course they are not. So why don't they rebel openly? Women are powerful in the way they experience life and how they lead their own life. It is therefore impossible to explain why women would accept for millennium to be maltreated. If there is oppression by one gender over the other and there is acceptance on both sides, there must be a possible explanation that makes it understandable. Understandable does not mean acceptable, of course. Could this explanation I propose here not be the factor of domination of masculine values over feminine attitudes in our society?

One terrible illustration of this extreme preference of masculine values may be shown in the way women, especially in countries like China or India, participate in aborting their own child when they know that the baby will be a girl, after using detection means provided by modern technology that unable to detect the gender of babies before they are born. Resulting from this behaviour dictated by a clear cultural preference that favour the birth of boys over girls, one can observe that there is a imbalance between the numbers of women and men that becomes very strikingly extreme in some countries. In the world there is usually an average of 93 to 99 men for 100 women, but this proportion increases to 102 in India, 105 in China, and even 106 in Pakistan⁵.

This is a crude way to show how we are all intoxicated by masculine patterns of behaviour in the way that we give preference to what is

5 According to statistics published by le Monde diplomatique, July 2006

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masculine (Yang) over what is feminine (Yin). It is important to notice that part of this disequilibrium is certainly due to the killing of women which is a crime committed by men because they want to escape paying a dowry or care for a girl when they wished to have a boy. But nevertheless the imbalance is mainly the product of a clear preference for the domination of masculine patterns of behaviour (action, speed, greed) over feminine ones. In that women and men are more or less equally involved.

This does not concern only the choice of letting or not letting live girls before they are born (this is only one example among many!). This way to favour masculine values impacts in a much wider way on each of our choices. We can give an infinite number of examples that will illustrate this trend. For instance, when I prefer my own promotion at the cost of my colleagues, I practise the preference of competition over care; it is the same kind of “abortion” of the feminine. When I choose to fly to London for the weekend I choose also to grab more than I’m entitled to, in comparison to the average world level. I refuse to consider the negative impact of the pollution and noise of my flight at the expense of poorer countries: mechanisms of climate change but also vectors of globalisation and flattening of cultural and natural diversity. This is also a form of “abortion” of the feminine. Leaving aside the examples at larger scale, I can also easily give examples at a more mundane level of everyday life: I love to drive my car because I’m comfortable and it gives me a feeling of power because I love speed. A more adequate behaviour would be to remain less mobile because life happens where I am and I do not need to go anywhere to get what I believe I need. Slowness and my feminine awareness of its proper quality of life will restrain me from acting according to these masculine values of speed and efficiency.

I believe that, in describing this general tendency to practise systematically a symbolic (but effective) form of abortion of the feminine, we manage to reach and touch the ground of the problem of gender relationships. This is of course a very different vision from the traditional one that sees an oppression of women by men, yet it does not negate this other form of oppression either. On the contrary it integrates it into a wider picture that may better describe it and propose also a broader explanation and context.

In the coming chapter we will examine how this pattern of masculine domination and feminine recessive character, or abortion, works in many fields and we will see how, because we have each of us both feminine and masculine trends in us, we can correct our choices in order to leave more potential of expression for feminine values and in this way correct the balance and allow a better equilibrium between masculine and feminine. It is a vital issue as our personal or collective growth can only happen harmoniously if we are able to integrate both our gender dimensions.

2) YANG DOMINATING OVER YIN

We have just examined how gender qualities are formed by a combination of antagonistic Yin and Yang characters which are, on one hand, deeply related to gender because of the fundamental gender experience that fosters us at the origin and, on the other hand, yet include also characters of the opposite gender because it is a fundamental trait of each character to be always combined with its opposite in a more or less evident proportion.

This art of combination seems to be the true essence of the Yin and the Yang; these characters are meant to combine and to become complementary to each other in order to form a new unity that marries the feminine and the masculine and that relates to the biological gender but yet introduces many other aspects of the opposite gender. If this form of composition of antagonistic forces truly constitutes the basic principle of gender formation of identity for each of us, we then have to be aware that it is far from being the rule that leads the present practice in our western culture.

According to our modern practice, on one hand, we identify socially with our gender and we accept to define archetypical roles we have to conform to and on the other hand we want to deny differences because we wish to be free from any predetermination of our personal identity. When we experience gender as a strong polarisation, we discover that this polarisation creates a strong hierarchy of one gender (Yang domination) over the other (Yin abortion). This form of apparent weakness of the Yin quality is what I called the recessive character of femininity (Yin) due to the fact it can only resist the dominant character (Yang) when it can find a protected space to express itself; this recessive character is also due

to the fact that we are generally all of us, i.e. independently of our gender, more attracted by Yang values than by Yin qualities. This double aspect of the recessive character of the Yin (need for protection and second rank in choices) seems to be more or less the rule when we adapt to predefined gender roles. On the contrary, when we want to promote equality between both genders, gender distinction seems to vanish and our practice is impoverished because this distinction does not mean anything special anymore.

Let's see in more detail how these two extreme attitudes cohabit in our daily life.

Gender roles

Roles according to genders

Privileges, power and preferences participate to define social roles, based on gender identities, between conformism and exclusion.

Role models are complex images of what we should be. The image may be simplistic but the process that generates it and the way it is accepted and implemented are complex phenomena.

Traditional societies have developed very complex definitions of gender roles. At the first glance they seem to reserve hunting for men and responsibility of the household for women, but this simplistic appearance hides a much deeper complexity of respective false and real powers. It is fascinating to observe the extreme diversity of role's definitions one can observe from one culture to the next. Traditional cultures are as manifold as they are numerous. It would be fascinating to investigate this diversity because it would teach us the many possible conditions which have defined the many forms of

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specialisation according to gender. We have to remember that these traditional societies have been the original sources of our own practice, even if our ways of life have much evolved since the origin. These traditional societies never remain very far; they still subsist in many ways in remote areas such as mountains, vast plains, deserts, forests, boreal spaces, i.e. at proximity from where we live. Many of them have been radically eradicated but is there any country where they have completely disappeared? Probably not. With them we share a common humanity and what they practise is often a subtle combination of innate needs we have forgotten. Most of them do not rely on material abundance or accumulation, or on these mighty means that have deeply metamorphosed our own practice of power and equity in modern societies.

In each culture, out of the distinction that arises from what I have called the gender experience (giving birth / structuring the environment), an evolved practice has developed. Social habits have shaped this original experience and have constructed around it a code of formal rules and behaviours that guide the relationships. From the original time many of these rules subsist today which human primitive societies had established to prevent inappropriate relationships such as adultery or incest. Our modern society is still penetrated today with this way of thinking because it seems to be part of our humanity more than some artificial rules that our ancestors would have invented or imposed.

Some of these rules of specialisation according to gender can be surprising. The woman liberation movement has described them almost systematically as tools of oppression (which is often true) but they often reveal themselves to be also true elements of power for women. It is amazing to see how, in many African countries, women in general are in charge of selling products on the market. It provides

them with an incredible power because they become the agents of relationships on the public square and they produce and bring home the monetary income. It is also amazing to see how in many Saharan countries women are the queens of the home where they are all powerful, deciding about the destiny of the family, while the man remains mostly outside this private sphere, welcoming his friends or business connections into the guest room which is the only one accessible for men who are not part of the family. These feminine and masculine spheres are like two disjointed realms.

Disrespect and oppression of women exist all over the world. As men are usually physically stronger and confirmed by a whole network of patriarchal relationships and traditions that support them as dominant actors, they are in a powerful position to impose their will and may force their wife or partner into slavery. This form of exploitation is probably more exacerbated by a context that focuses on accumulation and competition than by a network of relationships based on complementarity and interdependence. This form of violence is probably more frequent in poor settlements of our rich societies than in traditional settings. It is important to see how much greed and competition or a divided and competitive perception of society will reinforce tendencies of exploitation and domination.

Privileges arise from both diversity and inequality when these two conditions combine. They rely on advantages that a certain category of people enjoys at the expenses of another. In general we are used to defend our privileges because we believe they constitute almost a right. We refuse to see how much these privileges twist our perception and transform the interpretation we have of the world and of what happens around us. Privileges become in this way a form of distorted perception that tends to justify and reinforce our social, material and immaterial advantages. In terms of gender differences

privileges tend also to reinforce our position in our gender identity, especially if this position offers advantages the other gender does not generally enjoy. It is why they tend to reinforce domination and exploitation, while, on the contrary, a more acute sense of justice and a free capacity to look at our own position with detachment would allow us to see more objectively what is at stake and to imagine how we could contribute to transform relationships in order to generate more justice and more equality, even if necessary at the expenses of our own advantages and privileges. This acknowledgement means that we all tend generally to consolidate the domination of men over women and, still more important, the emphasis of masculine (Yang) dominant values over feminine (Yin) recessive ones.

Natural dispositions and vocations are also very much influenced and transformed by culture and social construct. Yet the original pattern can resist very strongly these external influences. For instance women seem less attracted by power than men. It means, with equal chances, they would less often choose to become leaders. If this statement is true, it may explain that the lack of women's representation in our corporations and governments is not only due to the fact that men are dominant and pushier but also to the fact that women prefer other forms of participation to foster the evolution of our communities. In general they would probably favour influential presence among people based on natural authority over a lonely form of leadership based on structural power. This explains why a woman prime minister is more often of the style of Margaret Thatcher (Yang) than of Sr Theresa of Calcutta (Yin) who was nevertheless a very strong woman. The reversed is also true: as men's jobs are shaped on men's attitudes, they do not attract women because they do not offer the quality of conditions they need for being at ease in the exercise of their own expression. Probably, when government's style will evolve, it will open many more doors for women's expression on state level.

This understanding shows that our true original nature, as a gender that experiences life differently, remains powerful in our choices, independently of the social external rules that influence our personal evolution. This does not mean evidently that women should not play roles of leadership. Of course they can do that very well, and preferably in a feminine style which will certainly be a great contribution. It just seems they do not feel so attracted by this kind of roles.

It is clear in my eyes, with a few exceptions, that famous women are not women who were in a powerful institutional position but rather women who had a personal authority that did not depend on official social status but relied on special personal aptitudes or attitudes. The lack of women in powerful institutional positions can be explained by the fact women have been barred from accessing mighty roles. But this explanation is a bit short. The true explanation is rather that women are in general freer because they are better rooted in their own being, more able to listen to their deeper inner call. They do not occupy the place of power but situate themselves in the in-between, in the relationship between the parts. It is indeed where everything happens. They are probably more at the right place where things can be influenced. This is not an institutional place of power but it is a space where the dynamic of relationships can be transformed by their direct presence. They act at the core itself of the relationship. What is indeed the place for a true power if not this? A Clare of Assisi, a Teresa of Avila, a Simone Weil (the philosopher), a Etty Hillesum are part of the best heritage of humanity. They were not in powerful positions but, probably because of this lack of institutional status, they were able to teach humanity much more than influential males are capable of. Is this acknowledgement not in itself a great celebration of the power of femininity?

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Another aspect of gender roles is the strong impact of publicity on the models for our behaviours. The omnipresence of publicity everywhere and the huge investments made into it are the proofs of its efficiency. One can also notice how much it influences so many acts of our lives. These patterns shape also the image of each gender and the way we all try more or less to conform to, or feel attracted by, these fashionable patterns. Women are reduced to objects of pleasure and men to macho dominators. Is that not a poor vision? It is amazing to observe how much some women follow fashion and dress in a very sexy way that makes sometimes other people feel uncomfortable because they seem to be slaves of conforming to imposed patterns. Is this free choice, self-oppression or truly slavery? Imagine a world where all publicity would be forbidden or impossible, what a freedom it would be to reinvent everything and to answer true needs!

I don't wish to develop more these considerations about gender roles because it has been done very thoroughly by more competent people than me.

Women's liberation movement

Women's liberation has broken open a vicious circle of false representations / situations of oppression. It has empowered us all.

The women's liberation movement has played a fundamental role in breaking a situation of conflict and oppression and it has opened new doors for a completely different understanding of relationships between the feminine and the masculine.

The most powerful effect it had on our western society has been to encourage people to experience different forms of balance between both genders. Women were encouraged to work, men to stay home

and take care of the children. The images of gender roles have been shuttered and people made free of living different lives, liberated from fixed patterns of behaviour.

More practically it has also provided women with a form of solidarity, especially among women but also with other men who believed in gender freedom. This new energy has allowed confronting unjust situations, to change the power ratio between dominant and submissive partners. Economically and politically also it changed the way we accept that all parties can be involved.

We all have been empowered to discover new ways of living, new balances between roles and Yin or Yang attitudes and aptitudes. This is probably the most creative aspect of the women's liberation movement. As we are allowed to think differently, it seems there is no limit to our freedom. It opens all possible futures. Yet we have to learn how to recognise the limits which are inbuilt in our own human nature. The feeling of total freedom that liberation has awakened provides this incredible energy but it is important that we do not destroy ourselves with this newly reconquered power. Limits are by essence inbuilt in our human condition. Nature cannot provide more than it can renew, men cannot give birth, individual freedom should not impose on others, etc. The difficulty is, once the barriers have been thrown down, how we may find in ourselves enough mastery and awareness to be able to recognise natural limits and to accept them. In fact freedom as we understand it is an illusion. Freedom is not just the possibility to choose what pleases us. It would be then, if it were so, just a repetition of what has been before and liberation would have just been a change of roles where oppressors lose their power and oppressed people could become the new oppressors. Freedom is the recognition of the immanent order. This is freedom because it encompasses the faculty to recognise and accept what is

and to feel at ease even when one does not control the others. True freedom is detachment when it becomes able to accept the inbuilt order of natural cycles, of natural limitation of growth, of gender differences, of diversity of cultures and people, of complementarity of roles. More than the possibility to choose, freedom is indeed the ability to conform to truth. Truth is manifold in the way we understand it and it takes many different forms of expression but Truth (with capital T), that nobody knows, remains one and cannot be falsified. True freedom is then to adapt to Truth. This is surrender and detachment. Once one has surrendered, one becomes truly free. This is probably the message women's liberation has not succeeded to discover because it was too much focused on the breaking open of so many possibilities. But it opens nevertheless the way to this further recognition, that has still to come, because the breaking of the barriers is the first stage of a re-appropriation of our own rights, of our own responsibilities and limits. Before we identify where the natural limits truly are, we need to remove the previous limits in order to perceive clearly the totality of our living space.

I believe the women's liberation movement has remained stuck in a gender conflict that it identified with the relationship between men and women. Men were the oppressors and women the victims. As I already said, although it is true in many cases, the fact nevertheless remains that it is a very poor interpretation. It would mean that women are very weak and have accepted for so many centuries and even millennia to be oppressed. I don't think this explanation is valid because it is fundamentally incomplete; I find it even insulting for women. For me the true explanation is rather in what I have already explained: on one hand the recessive character of feminine qualities, that need to be protected to be able to find full means of expression, which requires a lot of maturity, and on the other hand our constant preference, whether men or women, for Yang values of efficiency,

speed, accumulation, etc. that inevitably participates in limiting considerably opportunities of expression for Yin qualities, precisely for the reason that these qualities are recessive.

Gender specialisation

In traditional societies social roles are defined according to gender but this does not create a hierarchy of value between people.

In traditional societies 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 in traditional societies a clear distinction of gender throughout all types of work of vernacular economy, because the experience of gender influences the shaping of personality, makes people who they are and fosters their skills and aptitudes. 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. By losing our personal identity linked with gender we become "better" cogs in the production line.

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 it is nevertheless urgent to notice how the expression of our diversity of personalities and gifts gets squashed in the name of productivity. And this standardising 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

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mimic masculine attitudes in order to perform. By opposition the 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; and a few main considerations concerning gender issues are therefore 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 needs 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 tasks and 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.

- 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.
- 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. When a task is executed for the necessity of it and for the service of the community, it is valued as a service and not measured in terms of prestige. It generates recognition and gratitude whatever it consists in. Cultivating the garden, cooking the meals or emptying the composing toilet are just necessary tasks not labelled by values. There is no such distinction of class, 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.

The unisex issue

Our trade system has uniformed our ways of being, disconnecting them from our own personality which is linked with our gender.

On the contrary of the traditional society, our modern urban society denies gender differences and practises a kind of unisex pattern. Most people refuse the principle that gender should define a form of specialisation in activities, between men and women. They believe gender should not define a better ability of one gender for specific types of activities. It is recognised that we do not live any more under the influence of nature. And yet we are highly specialised but this happens according to skills and trade for economic reasons and because of higher requirements linked with higher level of technology and know-how. 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.

Not only activities are no more linked with our gender capacities but we are ever more trained, women and men, in an identic 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. Even more sophisticated professionals such as 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 (and often also their personality) component; they have been reduced to a function. And this form of devaluation by impoverishment is very

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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 contrary, 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. What matters is how, in this case, each one does this in their own way, related to gender and personality, and not as a cog. 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 and impoverished 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 ingrained feminine (Yin) mentality emphasises by contrast how dominating and violent our modern world has become with its undercurrent anger and resentment. The vernacular way is deeply another way of looking at the same world. I believe this is a very inspiring and meaningful challenge for our own necessary mutation. Remember, we talk in general terms about the model! Practice is certainly more difficult and more complex. Yet, before we start implementing new ways of being together, we have to choose the right model of inspiration!

Masculinisation through history

7 stages of masculinisation

Our human history and evolution is characterised by a constant development by stages of the domination of Yang over Yin values.

The unisex issue is a good example of how our society has evolved toward more masculine patterns of behaviour. The trend of favouring masculine (Yang) values over feminine (Yin) ones is very old.

When we observe what we know of human evolution through the millennia and centuries, we may discern general trends that characterise history and the slow transformation of our western civilisation. I would like now to try to sketch very roughly this evolution in the way I perceive it, and show how it favours a slow progressive dominance of masculine values. This evolution happened by stages. Although there are many stages I will describe only seven major ones in my eyes.

These seven stages have all something in common. Each of them is marked by a new discovery that generates a deep change in the way human beings are relating to their environment in particular and to life in general. Each discovery has offered new potentials revealed by new technologies or by new ways of thinking or forms of understanding the way surroundings are regulated by natural laws and human interaction. This is what we could call the progress made possible by each step. Yet this progress cannot be complete if it is not able to integrate the new stage of progress into what had been practised and assimilated previously. In general one may observe that each progress has preferred to discard previous values, as if they were made invalid by the new discovery, instead of trying to make a new synthesis between what was valid before and what has been discovered as new. It is an almost constant trend in our human development, it seems to me, that we replace the old by the new instead of evolving toward more complexity in integrating more factors and dimensions and trying to marry the old traditional perception with the new means. Particularly when technology offers

new (easier) solutions, there is a tendency to simplify reality to the mere technical response and to reduce the new complexity revealed by the discovery in abandoning the previous form of knowledge. In itself it is probably a masculine trend to replace deep meaning by new technology. Let's see how this pattern repeats itself in the seven stages I have chosen to describe as main examples.

- 1) **The discovery of agriculture:** When human societies started to practise agriculture, they were able to abandon their hunting-gathering ways of finding their subsistence and they could settle down into villages and towns because they had a better food security offered by a bigger quantity through more or less regular food production and through possibilities for storage. This new practice allowed people to develop confidence in the way they could handle the forces of nature and use them for their own interest. This was the progress. Yet this progress seemed soon to erase the feeling that mankind remains nevertheless part of nature and has still to adapt to its cycles and laws despite the fact agriculture offers a means to take advantage of these cycles and to relatively control how they can improve conditions of human life. Through this new impression of controlling nature mankind lost a part of the sense of sacredness and of its own belonging to nature. The early stages of civilisation had been mainly matriarchal (Yin) because nature was the feminine goddess that was nourishing mankind. The discovery of agriculture turned the gods into patriarchal figures (Yang) at the image of the transformation that had happened technically which changed the way people perceived their relationship with nature and the sacred dimension of life.
- 2) **Greek civilisation and Scholastic:** The next stage I want to examine happened much later. It consisted in the Greek discovery of philosophical thinking (especially Aristotle) and its rational

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dimension that was later reintroduced into European culture by Arabic influences (Averroes) and the Scholastic era at the Gothic time. It was the time when St Thomas Aquinas restructured the whole of Christian theology and dogmas in the same extremely precise way as simultaneously the architecture of the Gothic era was discovering how to adapt the design and structure of cathedrals (rib vaults, columns, buttresses, etc.) to the observation of physical forces. The progress was the new way to apply rationality as a new method of understanding of metaphysical dimensions or as a tool that could observe the physical world and propose strategies that allowed solving problems of everyday life, whether they were practical (stone building) or metaphysical (religion). Yet this progress seemed contradictory to the experience of intuition and symbolic thinking that had prevailed so far. Despite its scientific approach of nature the Middle Age had also strongly a mythical way of thinking. Rationality came therefore as a rich complement rather than as a substitute way of thinking. Both ways had to marry in order to foster a richer approach. Yet rationalism (Yang) tended to evacuate intuition (Yin) instead of combining with it, because they were perceived as antagonistic more than complementary.

- 3) **Renaissance:** Soon this new ability of observing the world in a scientific and rational way transformed the relationship mankind had with its environment. For instance the Copernican new understanding of the universe and the systematic observation of anatomy helped mankind to reach another stage of scientific and artistic development when it became capable of relating to its surroundings as something distinct it could observe, describe, understand, and transform. This led to a perception of man as a demiurge, i.e. a smaller version of God in his creative power. The progress was the discovery and development of science and art as means to understand the laws of nature and the place of mankind

in the universe. Yet this progress seemed soon to ignore how mankind is dependent on the whole universe for its surviving inasmuch as society started to develop an image of itself that was no more related with the whole cosmos. Man became a special creature that was no more perceived as dependent on its context but seemed free to shape its own destiny. If it was positive to discover the potential that relied on this awareness of its own creativity, it was nevertheless an illusion to believe that mankind was made free to become the master of the universe. The mystery of sacredness one feels still very present in the paintings of the Quattrocento vanished and were replaced by a strong ambition of shaping the environment according to human wishes. The present ecological collapse of our century is the best proof that Renaissance should have made a more balance synthesis between its creative power (Yang) and an humble awareness of the fact that we still belong to nature and have to adapt to its laws and respect the sacred dimension of its evolution and orientation (Yin). Later the Newtonian model of the cosmos even went so far as to represent the world as a gigantic clockwork whose functioning could be observed and foreseen with a very high precision. Most part of the perennial wisdom (Yin) was then replaced by a mechanical and materialistic representation of the universe (Yang).

- 4) **Colonisation:** The next stage is indeed simultaneous to the Renaissance time but it is interesting to examine it separately. The development of science and the implementation of new technologies in the Middle Age and the Renaissance allowed the development of navigation and the discovery of new continents. Colonisation became the new trend, especially with the Portuguese, Spanish, British, French and Dutch conquests of America, Africa and Asia. Soon these new continents became the sources of many new resources; and violence, robbery,

exploitation and slavery became rapidly the principal characteristics of this new form of trade. The progress was the discovery of new continents and of new cultures that offered the opportunity to widen the western understanding of life because the differences of these other cultures with what was already known were so radical that it became evidently a high challenge to recognise the common humanity that was linking the newcomers with these indigenous people or the western cultural heritage with these traditional cultures. At that time many traditional (vernacular) cultures were still very present and alive on the western continent because agriculture was still the main source of subsistence that was relying on adaptation to nature and its laws and was shaping also human and social values and beliefs; it means that traditional cultures were still all around Europe, not only in remote areas but also in nearby countryside or mountains. Yet the discovery of new races and completely different ways of living, under very different climates and with profoundly different beliefs and customs, challenged the human perception by the newcomers, as if a vernacular way of living would be something completely new. It was so challenging that this progress of new encounters was quickly transformed into pure one-sided domination (Yang) at the expense of any possible respect or recognition of (Yin), or even inspiration by, these indigenous traditions that had developed for millennium into deep and respectful understanding of their own environment and into very sustainable practices. Of course these traditional cultures were also far from being perfect but they had certainly their own coherence. In hindsight it becomes now clear how domination could only be consolidated if there were no respect for these conquered cultures. Yet, despite of this unfavourable context, encounter nevertheless happened because people were inevitably living side by side and they had many opportunities to meet one

another; some of them were more than average able to enjoy diversity and exchanges, even with a certain respect and curiosity to discover an unknown wealth. Despite these exceptions the synthesis was made impossible by the choice to exploit these new territories as if they were not occupied by equal human beings of the same humanity. Either the dominating power developed racist theories that tried to prove their own superiority or even they went so far as to consider these other populations as not being human and they declared these territories “terra nullius”, i.e. land that belonged to nobody (empty space). This unilateral declaration of the inexistence of the others made it much simpler to exploit.

- 5) **Industrial Revolution:** The further stage of this conquest of the world by masculinity can be seen in the accelerated trend of industrialisation through the 19th century. The discovery of a possible use of new sources of energy (steam, electricity) and the development of new technologies allowed a radical development of all means of production that generated much profit and excesses in goods and capital. The progress was made possible by the assistance of new machines that multiplied considerably the human ability to transform matter. Yet this progress, instead of offering an improvement of life conditions for all people (Yin), has been side-tracked for the interest of the bourgeoisie elite (Yang) who was able to accumulate a huge range of power and wealth. The industrial revolution transformed western human society into a sharp division of social classes that, more than ever before, were contrasting by their immense differences in terms of privileges and accumulation of material wealth for a few, on one side, and of extreme poverty and exploitation for the majority, on the other side. The contrast was so threatening that the state had to compensate the poorer category of the population by a form of assistance that developed immediately (Poor Law, Speenhamland,

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1795). These new special measures designed to alleviate poverty were taken even before the most pernicious effects of this social segregation had appeared clearly, because the fact of antagonism and clash of social classes was already discernible in the process itself, not as a side-effect but as a main feature that constituted the dynamic itself of the process of wealth building and accumulation. No synthesis was made, but only marginalisation of the majority of the population, used as workforce to be sold on the market. Values of equity, care, justice and peace (Yin) were also drastically evacuated by the evident advantages of a materialistic approach of wellbeing (Yang).

- 6) **Imperialism:** Out of this development imperialism ensued as a means to discover and intensify new outlets for products, new fields for investment of available capital and new sources for more diversified resources for the industrial process. Imperialism differs greatly from colonisation although they have both many common characteristics. The latter consisted mainly in European people establishing themselves in these new countries, under the protection of a military presence, and developing large estates that allowed them in general to live a comfortable life and to accumulate a pretty large wealth in conditions of domination and power. By contrast imperialism involves rather agents from the mother country who produce goods they want to be exported and sold to the colonised countries or who need to import resources from these countries or to invest capital in further corporations established overseas. In this sense imperialism consists in a further grade of conquest of the dominated country. This stage of imperialism, based essentially on overproduction, led the investors, supported by national governments and armies, to reinforce or extend their presence in the colonial lands and take control of them as investors and exploiters. This stage of evolution is so much characterised by Yang values that it is

difficult to imagine with which Yin values it could have combined if not the respect and fascination that could have arisen from contacts with so different cultures, lands and climates. But it did not more than it had happened at colonial time. On the contrary the pressure on the conquered territories increased in very violent ways. In continuation with the colonial era, indigenous populations were massacred or decimated or used as workforce or prevented to work in their traditional trades in order to create a form of monopole. Very often they were also killed by epidemics because they could not resist the plagues the conquerors had brought in under the form of new diets or many diseases or alcoholism. But in all cases indigenous people have been treated with a form of contempt that was believed to justify any form of cruelty.

- 7) **Globalisation:** The next stage of this evolution can be seen today in the general trend for globalisation. The richest industrial countries, that had established their own economic and political power under the cover of protectionism and at the expenses of the southern territories that they had exploited, continue nowadays to act under the spell of eternal growth on a limited planet. At any price they look today for further outlets for the excess of goods they produce as a consequence of a system based on overproduction. Globalisation tends to involve far away countries into wider free market exchanges (neo-liberalism) that are meant to profit the leaders of this system based on the maximisation of profit. One of the most recent extensions of this trend can even be seen in the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by Anglo-Saxon countries under the form of military invasion that offered a maximum of freedom to private corporations trusted with missions having to do with fields as varied as military forces, strategy, security, construction, education, management, government. Here again there is no possible synthesis for the

same reasons as previously, because we can observe how feminine values (Yin) of respect and acceptance are overridden by masculine values (Yang) of greed and efficiency in the name of accumulation.

This description in seven stages is evidently short and simplistic. Many other factors should be certainly described and added to create a more complete and truer picture. My intent is here only to show that our patterns of development run most of the time according to the same tracks of will for power and domination at the expense of human values. Without the conscious choice to create a protected space where nurturing feminine values of acceptance and care could be kept safe, masculine values will dominate and, in the name of efficiency, prevent Yin qualities from arising. Efficiency has yet nothing bad in itself if it does not transform relationships into an antagonistic fight for exploitation or competition or a struggle for surviving.

At this stage of our evolution, in our western society, we can notice, as I mentioned it before my description, that the stages of evolution have been incomplete by lack of ability to integrate the previous stages of evolution with the last discovery and to bring them together into a new synthesis. The examples of Mary and John the Baptist, as well as the considerations about the myths from Genesis (Adam and Eve and the serpent), remind us that we have to learn to marry femininity and masculinity, i.e. to protect Yin values from being eradicated by Yang efficiency in order for both to combine harmoniously.

Western domination and racism

The conquest of southern countries by western nations has imposed itself in the name of a pretended cultural and racial superiority.

The unisex approach explained earlier is a good example of how our modern society has flattened differences between genders and tends to standardise relationships according to the simplistic economic pattern it has adopted as its leitmotiv. Colonisation and imperialism, and globalisation today, based on the logic of neo-liberalism, have been the main vectors for the expansion of a typified western way of life that pretended to become universal, i.e. that aspired at imposing its own law onto the whole world. My previous description of the stages of evolution in history has shown how it slowly and progressively imposed masculine values over feminine ones.

Because they had good ships, good weapons and very little moral restraint, western countries (England, France, Netherland, Germany, and before them Spain and Portugal) conquered most southern countries, first as colonies, and later as outlets for their imperialistic expansion. This is not wisdom and high values that moved Westerners to discover, and come in touch with, other countries, cultures and civilisations, and still less any eventual so-called superiority of their own civilisation and culture. It was evidently only their own material and political interest (greed and power) that motivated them. Certainly yet this spirit of conquest was also exacerbated by a mighty curiosity and a healthy fascination for the unknown.

Only later, when they discovered in these new conquered countries other ways of living and other behaviours, Westerners felt compelled to develop new theories about their own racial and cultural superiority to justify what they were doing. Later (in the 19th century)

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Darwinism, in a twisted interpretation, came to their help in an awkward way. Racism developed in a very partial perception that emphasised the superiority of European race over southern ones. The conqueror declared himself of higher rank than the victims of his conquest. That was only the talk of one side about themselves, just pure narcissism in complete deny of the evident common humanity that was and is patently uniting all living human beings. And even the concept of race was ill-defined because it was more ideological than biological.

Yet, beyond the discourse, colonisation remained colonisation and it was indeed only question of domination, exploitation and extraction of resources and local workforce. Certainly, among all the people involved in this process, some very rare Westerners have been a few exceptions who could relate to the indigenous populations on equal terms of respect and reciprocity. The Jesuits for instance took a very courageous stand in favour of the indigenous people they tried to protect from oppression and cultural annihilation. Yet the general frame of conquest was built on force and domination, i.e. on violence.

One can say roughly that two models can be applied in case of conquest: either on one hand the conquered land becomes integral part of the conquering country and all people who live in it have then to integrate into the social, economic and political system of the “mother” country as more or less equal citizens; or on the other hand the “new” land is considered as pure material resource and it is not integrated into the dominating system but only used as a “commodity”. The former model is more appropriate for extension into neighbour territories. The latter is usually the solution for colonies and overseas territories.

In the first case – integration into the “mother” country which was rather the model intended but never implemented by France in Algeria - indigenous people were meant to become nationals of the conquering country and the system of administration of the “mother” country had to be extended to the conquered land. All people became in principle equal, although the difference of classes, languages, cultures, customs and beliefs soon created such a contrast that the (indeed enforced) integration of the colonised people revealed itself in any case difficult, if not impossible, especially for the reason that the new system was very much inappropriate and was denying any value of what had existed before, in the conquered territories. Indeed a whole traditional system had pre-existed for so many millennia and had generated a very well-defined social structure and culture that regulated relationships between people or between them and their natural environment. Colonialism could not notice this quality inasmuch as it has always shown a strong contempt for, and denial of, diversity and equality because it is based on domination by force and on ignorance of the essential nature of the conquered land and of what existed before the invasion.

In the second case – exploitation as a commodity, which was rather the model for the English colonies – indigenous populations were considered as lower casts and were meant to just fulfil the utilitarian function of workforce.

In both cases, when the “mother” country was confronted with the huge cultural gap that separated the dominating and the conquered cultures, the reaction of newcomers was of contempt and segregation. Whole classes of Europeans established their own domination while remaining “pure breed” (Creoles, Pieds Noirs). The whole endeavour was lately justified as a vast project of civilisation for these so-called lower races. In a complete contradiction with the Christian spirit of

poverty and compassion, Churches offered even their support in the name of mission and proselytism, with the exception of a few attempts to defend indigenous integrity (for instance the action of the Jesuits as already mentioned). The ideology of the dominating culture had to be spread among the poor primitive people of lower races. Such was the discourse. This was evidently pure invention as nothing could prove any superiority of the invading forces, especially given the way the conquest had happened through violence and destruction. As far as civilisation and missions were concerned it was the steepest contradiction to inflict the new culture and religion at the cost of enslavement and killing, in the name of the love of the neighbour. Only the power of guns, the performance of technology and an almost complete lack of moral restraint had made this aggressive domination possible.

Imposing “universal” patterns

Colonial, imperial and trade oriented expansion of western forms of development has been imposed as if these were universal values.

The influence of colonising nations on the dominated ones revealed itself to be very powerful. The large majority of colonised people had soon to adapt because, under the menace or impact of physical or economic violence, they had no other choice. A sort of social elite - or people in a position that allowed a relative degree of flexibility - noticed very soon how the imitation of the dominating new values opened a form of collaboration with the conqueror that offered them the possibility to enjoy certain minor or even major privileges, i.e. a better material position and some form of social prestige made possible by a certain degree of compromising. Colonised people had generally the advantage over the conqueror that they knew both systems, i.e. the colonial one with its new language and way of

thinking, as well as the traditional one, with its own cultural understanding and its often many traditional languages, while the conqueror remained often extremely ignorant of usual local practices and hidden aspects of traditional society. This allowed colonised people playing with, and combining ad infinitum, these often antagonistic trends of so adverse ways of thinking and living. Although it was mainly about compromising with imported enforced patterns, this game may also be seen as an opportunity to free oneself from traditional constraints, hence the game between two radically different systems that were yet both more or less oppressive, but for very different reasons: the colonial imported one because it was mainly exploitation, the traditional indigenous one because it was often rigid.

In this game between two contrasted patterns of evolution, the majority of colonised people had to learn to survive in paying the necessary price for adaptation, in regard on one hand to the cost of each advantage to be gained and on the other hand to their own respective degree of moral flexibility. From narrow collaboration to radical resistance all possible attitudes were made in principle possible for occupied people, evidently at a lesser or higher price to be paid consequently. One may well imagine how such a process of combining incompatible behaviours and values has impacted very strongly on these traditional cultures et how far, when later liberated, they had difficulties to find their own path of freedom and independence. As Frank Fanon⁶ so justly described it, decolonisation can only be a violent process if it has to be radical and truly freeing from all enslavement, whether economic, political, social or cultural. Violence is here rather understood as a psychological or sociological

6 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, Maspero, 1968.

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than as a necessary physical factor, that remains nevertheless its most frequent expression.

Despite all efforts of resisting colonial power, colonised people and their occupied lands have been deeply marked by the time of foreign domination. They have been deeply transformed by the dominating culture that seemed so effective (good technology) and so successful (material wealth of the conquerors), yet so humanly poor because grounded on contempt and domination. 1) The occupation had dismantled almost all traditional networks of power and economic exchanges that existed prior to the conquest. 2) It had also de-structured all channels of usual social communication or social justice and had replaced them by an administrative system based on arbitrary decisions by decrees formulated in the advantage of the conqueror. 3) It had reduced original traditional values from the past into discarded disvalues that did not seem to have any more meaning or significance. 4) It had introduced new habits of consumption that made the local economy dependent on foreign products or habits and on artificial imported fashions that were difficultly affordable while traditional production had been dismantled.

On top of all these four main and deep distortions it had also imposed its own language as ruling means for communication and its own administrative system, its own culture as well as its own values or its own ways of living and thinking. It had imported these new ways as if they were universal values that were unique and valid for anybody alive on this planet, although these values were evidently dictated by the own culture of the conqueror and, more important, shaped by dominating interests and privileges that these values and the accompanying discourse had to justify.

This affirmation of universalism is of course a terrible lie. It says that power, prestige and privileges are the main values in life that should guide our behaviours. It declares that the laws of economy (i.e. neo-liberalism) have to rule the world because material growth (on a limited and already exhausted planet!) is the main aim of our living together in order to make us richer and richer. There is certainly nothing bad in an intention that aims at implementing good life conditions. This is the positive aspect of the Yang trend of enterprise. But when it is not restrained by any counter-energy of self-limitation (Yin energy) that aims preferably at care, respect, compassion, equity, this Yang energy becomes radically destructive. We can see nowadays its negative effects in climate change, in conditions of extreme poverty that concern one sixth of world population or of relative insufficiency that concern three quarters of it, in violence that reigns on the international scene, mainly alimented by the most powerful states which are at the same time the main weapon traders and the five members of UNO Security Council (USA, Russia, China, United Kingdom, France), etc. This so-called universal model is just pure bankruptcy. It is a tragedy in itself, and it appears still more tragic when one sees how it is imposed onto the whole world and how powerfully it destroys the true potential of more feminine vernacular societies to develop deeper human values in their own necessary protected space. This protected space can't resist the attack of such powerful interventions, first from outside, and then from inside when these external patterns of development have been assimilated through acculturation.

This is precisely what happens now with globalisation. One single market tends to unify and homogenise a highly differentiated world with its mostly contrasting cultures and languages and beliefs. Western cultures, while denying their own subtle culture and spiritual wealth, have imposed their own simplistic perception of the world

limited to their own material interests in their will to extend their trade and profit facilities. By doing so, they contribute to destroy themselves and the others in all their vital diversity. It does not mean that trade goes against diversity; it means that the absolute priority given to trade and profit over human values of respect and complementarity has killed diversity because diversity (Yin quality) has not been protected and could not resist - being recessive - the domination by force.

The conclusion that ensues out of this domination of power and greed over the whole world is that we need to develop a new anthropology, a new understanding of the meaning of life and we need to create a protected space for this anthropology to take shape. What is the meaning of life? This is the most complex question that can be, and therefore there is probably no answer, but it is nevertheless essential that the question continues to be asked in order to keep our spirit awakened to the search of this deep mystery. It is not the answer that will lead us, it is the constant and never ending questioning that will keep us alive, and truly alive. The simple fact of daring to ask this question will prevent the present development based on destructive means from extending because the model cannot resist this questioning if it is answered sincerely. Searching has always been an invaluable strength of our western culture, yet it has too often fallen short into the abyss of material thinking or narrow scientific quantifying, mainly by lack of capacity to integrate the values incarnated by the previous stages of our long evolution. No synthesis of our successive discoveries has ever been made because we generally found easier to replace what had been by what was newly discovered, instead of trying to combine both and to find new forms of integrated synthesis. True science and true spirituality meet well and cooperate richly when they dare to endeavour on a higher level of investigation that is so central to the question of the essence of life.

Domination as destruction of life

Domination (exploitation of nature, repression of femininity, rejection of spirituality) leads to destruction of life and of relationships.

As we just saw in my very simplified description, mankind has revealed itself incapable, at each stage of its evolution, to integrate the assimilated deep values inherited from the past with the new intellectual, scientific and technical discoveries that were offering, at each stage, better possibilities of understanding and of mastery, yet without having necessarily to lose a wider perception of life as being a deep mystery on so many different levels. It seemed at each time easier to drop the old beliefs and replace them by more skills that tend to allow a better control on life, as if there were a contradiction between these past practices and the new patterns that had been discovered. Life indeed did not change in its essence but only was perceived differently, in most cases in a simplified version that evacuated stage by stage part of its mysterious dimension.

When we look back at our past evolution as mankind, we always have tendency to consider that each stage has offered progress. Certainly it did inasmuch as it discovered new possibilities, but it became nevertheless at the same time also poorer because, in general, the new patterns worked as simplification of our interaction with the world inasmuch as they were more of Yang quality (mastery) than of Yin essence (wider perception).

It is worth, after describing the general trend, to take time to examine in more detail how this happened in the stages I have already described. Each stage in fact represents the same general tendency for

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masculinity to grow and to prevent femininity from fully expressing itself. The masculine dominance allows a better performance but the meaning of its orientation gets progressively lost by lack of ability to listen and discern what is truly at stake. Nowadays - and it was probably the case all along the ages – we remain fascinated by material progress because it makes visible what has changed. We are less sensitive to immaterial values because they are still mentioned in books and talks but they become less active in our network of relationships and our social construct. This absence is certainly more difficult to discern and identify. It becomes usually more visible after the negative impact of this lack of understanding has been manifested by catastrophes, whether ecological (climate change) or political (totalitarianism and wars). This is probably why we remain great admirers of empires. We love the Roman Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the British Empire, although they have been hugely devastating enterprises. Our mind remains focused on the flashy aspects of material wealth and accumulation that express power and prestige. It is yet also significant that these dominating trends have also made possible beautiful philosophical endeavours or artistic expression.

I will now examine each of these stages under the following aspects:

- 1) Agriculture: domination over nature as a loss of its teaching about the essence of life.
- 2) Scholastic: domination of rationality as a loss of mythical thinking.
- 3) Renaissance: domination of scientific and technological thinking as a loss of awareness of the sacred and mysterious dimensions of life.
- 4) Colonisation: domination over other races and cultures as a means to create a false hierarchy in humanity.

- 5) Industrial revolution: domination of materialism as a loss of the experience of being.
- 6) Imperialism: domination over other continents and people as a loss of the sense of belonging.
- 7) Globalisation: domination of market as a standardisation force that disempowers people in their local community.

Let's take them one after the other.

1) Loss of the book of teaching

Domination over nature prevents us from listening to its generous teaching about the essence of life and from adapting to its laws.

When mankind started to practise agriculture, it discovered how people are indeed able to manage resources and to control, at a certain extent, at which speed they can be produced and stored in view of future needs. It made mankind less dependent on immediate access to resources. This has been a huge step in human development because it allowed having more time for leisure, i.e. culture. That was already the case for hunters-gatherers because they used to stop worrying for food as soon they could have gathered or caught what they needed to cover their needs and they could then spend the remaining time in celebrations. The difference was yet that agriculture provided a form of so far unknown security and it allowed organising social and cultural life in more structured ways. This transformation was a form of boost for social development but also an opportunity to set a form of specialisation and hierarchy that established new power structures. The possibility to store, i.e. to accumulate wealth, generates social stratification and new forms of dominance. Cities started to develop, whose growth and domination

were fed by storage and trade. Specialisation of trades and social power accompanied this stage of diversification.

Another dominant characteristic of this stage of evolution was the fact that nature seemed to be more under control. Mankind had the illusion they were in power to produce their own food. They believed soon that food was their own production while the transformation consisted in fact more in the way the growth power of nature was utilised and managed. This is probably the way to describe the main illusion that took place at that time and started to impregnate the manner people perceived how they were relating to nature. They believed to have become the masters of a power that nevertheless was escaping their control. They had indeed only learned to store and to control the distribution of food, and they had learned also very quickly to speculate because it became evident that storage and accumulation provided power and that this power could be used for the sake of power itself or to “make money” and accumulate more wealth.

The progress of increased food security and extended time for social encounter and intellectual or spiritual study is not the cause of the disruption this stage of evolution brought. The dysfunction resides rather in the fact that this illusion of dominating and controlling nature created a disconnection where mankind believed to be above nature, like not only separated from it but especially in control of it. Nature, i.e. the whole universe and its long evolution seemed to have happened only for the purpose of being in the service of mankind. Previously the pattern was that mankind was one of the many species of nature and that its subsistence depended on a complex form of interdependence of all species. Now it was the pattern of not only a dominance and control but also that nature was there at the disposition and for the convenience of mankind. Nature was on the

way to become the heap of resources it is seen to be nowadays. Just feel free to take what you need or what you want!

This transformation of mentality marks a huge step in our evolution because it breaks the pattern of harmony of a whole universe that sustains equally all species. It creates suddenly a tremendous disruption when it introduces one species as the core and centre of the whole process of evolution. Out of a network of intense relationships arose a form of circle centred on mankind as the focus and the purpose of all that was. Of course this new perception of the world was only a cultural and social construct that had nothing to do with reality, but it nevertheless was the perception that had to lead the further evolution of mankind. The illusion did not transform nature which remained equally interdependent, but it only changed the way human beings reinvented their proper place in the universe and behaved in the name of that illusion that was side-tracking them constantly. The consequence of this change of mind is now visible in the terrible damage we have inflicted onto our environment and also, and it is more important, in our consequently limited ability, to observe and understand nature, and listen to what it has to teach us.

When we believe that we can transform our environment as it suits us because we are the top species and nothing can oppose us, we change the dynamic of our surroundings: they are then transformed into what we want and they do not reveal anymore what they are truly. Yet nature is the only expression of the natural evolution of the universe and of its own laws. In disturbing this original order and pattern, or at least its visibility, we destroy the book of nature that reveals us the true essence of life. In doing so we have destroyed, or at least deeply modified, the fundamental teaching about life.

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Nevertheless we cannot change nature fundamentally. We can only change what we accept to see in it. Despite our inability to listen, this book of nature never stops to teach us what the laws of nature are and how they regulate life, although it does this in a disturbed way. Among these many laws we can describe succinctly:

- Cycles: nothing is created; nothing is lost; everything changes into the next stage of transformation. Wastes become resources; resources are renewed.
- Generosity: everything is provided free by nature; life, air, water, food, materials, etc.
- Imagination: nature creates ever new forms with a striking inventiveness; from whales to platypus, from penguins to swallows, from lichens to orchids, etc.
- Diversity: it generates more and more diversity and contrasts. Gullies become deeper, forests darker, deserts drier, species more numerous.
- Complementarity: every part of nature relies on other parts to survive. Interdependence is based on complementarity which is based on diversity.
- Cooperation: the many diverse species cooperate more than they compete. A community of life arises locally.
- Subjectivity: evolution is not led by chance but is guided by a pattern (Intention) that seems to aim at a final point, the Omega point of Teilhard de Chardin.
- Depth: form reveals a deeper content that remains invisible but can be nevertheless perceived in an incomplete way.
- Consciousness: while the material aspect (the Without) becomes more complex, the inner consciousness (the Within) develops and becomes deeper (Teilhard de Chardin again).

- Wonder: life generates wonder because surprising forms of abundance and mystery arise wherever they are not expected.
- Etc.

It is interesting to notice that our western society evolves precisely according to opposite trends. To the harmony of cycles it opposes exhaustion and destruction, to generosity and gratuity it opposes money exchanges, to imagination and creativity it opposes industrial repetition, to (bio)diversity it opposes standardisation, to complementarity it opposes rivalry and antagonism, to cooperation and care it opposes competition and race for profit, to subjectivity and intention it opposes rationality and indifference, to depth and mystery it opposes meaninglessness and flat land, to wonder and curiosity it opposes boredom and need for excitement, etc. Of course these oppositions are a bit simplistic but they reveal yet how far we have gone in betraying the laws of nature when we fear too much the unforeseeable dynamic of life and we try to tame nature. Our Yang trend to control represses our Yin curiosity and sensitiveness to the mystery of life.

2) Loss of mythical thinking

Domination of rationality prevents us from being receptive to the unfathomable truth expressed by symbolical or mythical teaching.

The Scholastic has been an important step of evolution in the Middle Age. As it has been described earlier it reorganised the whole structure of dogmas and faith in a very rigorous system that became a sort of catechism that aspired to summarize at its best the whole of complexity. This was evidently an important progress in the way faith could be perceived more clearly and explained, i.e. taught to next generations. Yet it was also a way to “put God in a box” and

take control over the unfathomable mystery of the divine presence and to lose the deep sense of humility that the unknown provokes in us.

At the same time, the Gothic era produced cathedrals that relied on a very similar approach to the Scholastic. It consisted similarly in analysing rationally physical forces and in proposing new techniques and especially new forms that answered these physical constraints. It discovered how to decompose the heavy walls and pillars of the Romanesque era into lines such as vaults, ribs, buttresses and thin columns that were designed to lead forces linearly to the ground. Liberated of static constraints the walls almost disappeared and many large windows could be created that were turned into glass windows, allowing light to flow into the building and creating in this way a very special effect of inner illumination.

This more rational approach certainly allowed a better control over the material world, but it also neglected to integrate the precedent ways of perceiving the surrounding world. These older traditional ways were more of symbolic and mythical nature than later on. Myths are these stories which reveal the essence of the world without explaining it but only by making it intuitively perceivable. The early Middle Age had been very marked by symbolic thinking. Most of the buildings, and especially churches of that time (Byzantine and Romanesque), were like books that taught about the divine mystery. They used in this purpose sculpture and painting. Artistic expressions of this early time did not respect realism or perspective in a rational way as it became the case after the Quattrocento. They used to propose representations that were less marked by realism but attempted to describe what is beyond the visible. Myths like Oedipus' or Prometheus' tell us about life. We do not have to believe that the story that they tell truly happened; the historical reality of Oedipus'

story is completely irrelevant; what matters is that we just need to understand what it tells us about the essence of life. Myths are not dogmas (formal expression of structured knowledge) but revelations (new doors onto an unknown dimension of life); it is why they cannot use direct rational language; they have to use symbols in order to describe the unfathomable Reality and to lead us beyond the world of appearances.

This is precisely the faculty we lost. Today it is difficult for us to think in terms that are not rational or directly related to material perceptions (Yang). Symbols and myths (Yin) seem to us unreal and esoteric, or rather even just despicable, like children tales!

3) Loss of sacredness

Domination of scientific thinking generates an illusion of being all-powerful, at the expense of a search for the sacred mystery.

The Renaissance discovered how to better observe the surrounding universe. Galileo and Copernicus created a deep revolution of science when they described the universe in a way that had never been shown before. This was evidently a deep revelation that perturbed profoundly the customs of this time because it painted a representation of the way planets were circulating around the sun which was in complete opposition to the way the solar system had been perceived so far. The Earth was no more the centre of the universe but became just one among many planets whose role seemed very secondary. It appeared that mankind was no more the cherished species that had to be in the centre. And yet Renaissance, despite this deep revolution that seemed to eject mankind to the periphery, succeeded to put nevertheless mankind at the core of

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creation as if creation had just happened for the sake of satisfying mankind's needs and ambitions.

Equally in anatomy great progresses were made. The objective observation of what was and how the human body was built brought new insights into the understanding of human structure and biology. It helped medicine to better treat people and artists to better represent human beings.

Perspective was also discovered. This new step not only allowed painters to represent better what they wanted to describe, but it transformed also the whole perception of our surroundings. In contrast with the visual perception that was prevalent in the past, perspective is centred on the observer. The "I" became the navel of observation. That was also a revolution where things could be observed from a subjective and personal point of view. The perception of the world became ego-centred.

This radical transformation of the way we perceive the world allowed a much better mastery of our relationship with our surroundings. We learned to develop technology and science. We became like small demiurges, it means almost similar to gods in our new power of creation. This was the gain. But the loss that went with it was the lack of capacity to integrate into this new stage of thinking the previous knowledge of sacredness. When mankind seemed to become all powerful, it lost its previous awareness of being just a part of a wider life community that included all forms of life, from the minerals to the plants and the animals. It lost also its awareness of the mysterious and sacred dimension of life that, even if it were better observed and understood, had not disappeared so far.

This mutation means that mankind seems to have missed the step of integrating the traditional perception of sacredness into this new stage of better and more realistic observation. Later (18th and 19th cent.) the description of our universe became similar to the picture of a big clockwork, i.e. a machine that runs in a foreseeable way and never changes. Further scientific discoveries in the 20th century, especially with the theory of relativity and quantum physics, could show how this simplification was inappropriate although it remained mechanically true.

The main change in this time is probably this new human ability for a form of self-centredness of mankind and of individuals who start to see the world from their own point of view instead of perceiving before all the wider global network of interconnectedness as one indivisible whole. It is evident that the belief to be at the top and at the centre of the universe does not help us to fit harmoniously into the wider community of life. An illusion of domination and of power for control does not allow a true understanding of what happens beyond our subjective understanding. We become like imprisoned in our self-awareness, which reveals us a subjective point of view but seems also to hide at the same time the wider real picture. It is paradoxical that the deepening of science, of observation and knowledge, despite the new and rich information it brought into a new form of consciousness, has led also mankind to a deep twist in its perception of the world. On one hand science discovered with Copernicus that mankind is not the navel of the world and on the other hand the power of science created an illusion that mankind is the master of the world. The latter discovery seems to have been stronger than the former. The illusion of centrality prevailed over the objective observation by science, instead of combining one with another in a new synthesis.

We have also seen about the myth of Adam and Eve how an authentic growth generates unity and abolishes dualism. The Tree of Life is an energy that creates the whole, without antagonism; this is pure harmony. On the contrary, the Tree of Knowledge creates the big split that happened (or was considerably reinforced) at the Renaissance. Strange how a myth can become so true and even realise itself historically, like a prophesy!

Self-centeredness means a sense of individuality and a personal responsibility. This is certainly a very positive gain when it allows the person to be in charge of their own options, yet it becomes destructive when it overshadows the sense of belonging. Individualism is often criticised as a selfish attitude, but it is wrong to understand individualism as egoism. It is indeed more powerful to understand it as another form of perception that loses the wider picture and replaces it exclusively by a self-centred perception. Everything then goes wrong because the main picture is absent. Self-centredness in the context of belonging to a wider community is just egoism but self-centredness without the wider picture is the mode we practice mainly today. It is an imprisonment in a twisted image of the world that is just meant to serve selfish interests, but yet prevents spiritual growth and maturity. How can one return to the wider picture when one is trapped in this narrow prison?

If this evolution of the Renaissance allowed a better mastery of science and of the resulting technology, it was also continuing at the same time to delete the book of nature and its teaching concerning the true essence of life. The Middle Age had a perception of the world as a broad network of interdependence between all living beings and as a wider entity that was sacred and whose Source was nourishing all beings and guiding them into a deeper discovery of the mysterious secret of human origins. In a very different attitude

toward nature and the cosmos, the Renaissance created a form of screen between mankind and the universe inasmuch as it proposed new intellectual knowledge and material mastery to solve the problems of our connexions between people or with our surroundings without to have to look beyond these immediate means. This screen added to the twisted perception of self-centredness and made the gain almost irrelevant. The technique could not compensate the lack of vision. The Renaissance was a great step, yet this new means were evacuating the wider picture (Yin) behind the tools of mastery it proposed and the self-obsession it allowed (Yang). Everything tended to be just mundane and to be taken for one's own purpose.

4) Loss of humanity

The domination of other races and cultures imposes an artificial hierarchy between peoples that distorts our common humanity.

Colonisation brought our European ancestors in touch with fundamentally different cultures and races, with completely different ways of life, because of differences of climate, of material conditions, of culture, of beliefs, of technology, etc. This was an extraordinary opportunity to recognise a common humanity and to interpret these major differences as so many chances of complementarity, of dialog, and of new experiences that would lead to the assimilation of unknown skills and unsuspected dimensions of Reality for both partners. This sudden opening to an unknown reality with all its mysterious aspects was the true progress of these new discoveries. But the challenge to do so seems to have been too big. It seemed too hard to accept one had something to learn from someone who was living naked and with low technology when one had developed a big ego and a great self-esteem because of the accumulated knowledge, the invented technology and the accumulated wealth one has

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achieved. The technological superiority (ships, weapons) of the newcomers, combined with an evident lack of moral restraint and a deep ignorance, allowed the conquerors to declare themselves of a superior race (like gods) bringing civilisation to the poor savages. This creation of a new myth – the superiority of a white race over indigenous people – was the most efficient simplification that would allow direct and inhibited exploitation: slave trade, extraction of new resources, massacres, stealing of gold and silver, etc.

The time of new discoveries did not succeed in integrating a wider perception of mankind as a diversified network of all form of beings. This diversity is yet the basic law of nature and it impacts evidently also on us human beings as parts of the wider web of life. Our cultural diversity is only the natural fruit of our climatic and racial diversity. Biodiversity is the natural cause of this further diversity that makes us all different. Our modern world has always struggled with diversity as if it was an obstacle to pragmatism. Diversity seems the hardest truth to accept for most human beings. Therefore it seems that mankind has always tried to construct social systems that were based on the management of diversity in terms of hierarchy, and not in terms of mysterious complementarity and reciprocal discovery.

The deep inability to accept diversity as a basic law of life seems to have challenged societies since their earliest origin. It means it is not something new. Early primitive tribes used to call themselves “the Men” or the “the Gods” or “the Best”. On the other hand, it seems also that the need to manage diversity increases also with social stratification. The more we become different from one another because of material wealth, the more we try to link status with this difference. It seems we need always to situate ourselves on a social ladder. We have difficulty to accept diversity if it is not linked with hierarchy. It means that difference cannot be assimilated if it does not

express a hierarchy of value. A cannot be different from B if A is not better or worse than B. Equality in difference does not seem possible, although it is evidently equality that allows difference to thrive. Despite our human resistance, nature tends to diversify as much as possible while our human societies tend to standardise as much as they can.

From our frightened human point of view, not only does diversity need a “justification” in terms of comparative values, but it calls as well for reinforcing the hierarchy that is established on differences. Differences in gender, race, responsibility, wealth, power, fame, knowledge, skills, etc. generate a social order based on categories that defines rights and duties for their members, and principally privileges for the dominating classes whose dynamic, like privileges, participates in increasing these same differences and in reinforcing the hierarchy. Domination and exploitation are the direct consequences of such a hierarchical system that refuses diversity in terms of equality.

As we accept that differences generate immediately hierarchy, because we do not know how to face them otherwise, we prefer not to be at the bottom of the ladder. It means that we need always to have someone else below us. We do not care whether what we have is enough or whether what we are is good for us; we need to be sure that we have more than our neighbours and that we are better than them, in terms of wealth, power, prestige, esteem. We need to sit as high as possible on the ladder because it seems as if the ladder would make us, instead of us being just who we are. And the fact we sit higher than the other is not sufficient; we need to find a justification for the permanent tension of competition that the race for the higher ladder rung generates between us. We are finally at war with our neighbours. Competition requires from us to win over our neighbours

and other competitors. We need them as victims of our competition and we need also a scapegoat⁷ to explain why our society is at war. It is very important, I believe, to recognise how much our social hierarchy is based not only on hierarchy but also on victimisation. Paradoxically the victim, after it has been executed, becomes a sort of saviour figure because it has brought back harmony, peace and unity into the community. Each society develops its own scapegoats: minorities, marginal people, strangers, refugees, Jews, Roms, Indigenous people, etc. They are innocent but they are loaded with the guilt we feel when we fight one another. Why can't we simply live in peace, among equals?

Is it not tragic that, instead of enjoying the wealth of diversity, we need constantly to become oppressors? It is a very subtle trend that we do not like to recognise because it is well hidden, but it is nevertheless very potent and effective. It transforms our daily experience into a constant struggle and competition one against the other, although this daily experience should be a constant wonder about what the others who are so different from us can bring to us. The source of this attitude is evidently fear, our own fear of what is different from what we know so well in our familiar daily habits. We do not know how to face the others when they are not like us, which they cannot be by essence; if they were, they would just be us! And our social culture, instead of helping us to cope with our fear and learn how to handle diversity, reinforces on the contrary our most negative trends and encourages our tendency to make victims and become oppressors.

⁷ See the brilliant explanation by Rene Girard: *Things hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford University Press, 1987.

In this dynamic of domination the discovery of the new continents and their thorough exploitation (people and resources) led the European conquerors to establish strict rules of hierarchy. It is evident that this artificially created hierarchy does not owe anything to wisdom or to any possible superiority; it relies only on the pure brutal power of weapons. The colonists “had no possible choice” to accept equality with indigenous people as they wanted to grab their land. The only way was to affirm the non-existence of these people: it was declared that the land was “terra nullius” or that the inhabitants belonged to an inferior species of half-human. Any other recognition of their common humanity would have prevented colonisation itself.

It is why any attempt by the British Crown to protect Aboriginal or Amerindian people was just pure hypocrisy. All instructions given by London to the colonies were just words, in order to present the public image of a caring nation. Of course they had remorse and tried only to save appearances. They pretended to care truly. And it is evident that there was also a powerful tension between the colonists and the government in the “mother” country because their interests were of very different nature: the former wanted a maximum freedom to do their own business and the latter was in charge of maintaining a minimum of order and good reputation. But the act of colonisation was nevertheless in itself a declaration of war to indigenous people and a decision to kill them in order to get their land, unless they would submit. As it could be required, these indigenous people did not submit as it was expected from them. It is why history (as it has been written by the invaders) declared them guilty of provoking the confrontation. Paradoxically the inhabitants of the land which was conquered were made responsible for resisting the invaders. One finds the same treatment in the justification of the invasion of Iraq by the US, UK and Australian forces: the resistance fighters were declared “insurgents”, i.e. considered guilty of breaking the law of

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domination. This false discourse was needed as a general theory to justify domination: racist theories were created that tried to validate the huge disparities that weapons had fostered. And insurgents are destined to become terrorists, as they do not see any other way out.

In this stage of development one can see how the discoveries of new continents and cultures, which were rich in themselves, led to a troublesome evolution of destruction and violence. Mankind has missed the opportunity to build a world based on diversity and complementarity (Yin). It preferred domination (Yang) as a justification of an ego-centred perception of life.

5) Loss of being

The exclusive focus on material production and profit has destroyed our ability to experience how life consists in just being.

The Industrial Revolution has brought a staggering evolution in mankind's mastery of energy and of technology that changed fundamentally our whole economic system and by consequence our whole social system. The practical role of each human being in the production system and the social position of each one were completely redefined according to purely functional criteria and to the ideology of an increased competition between social classes and groups of interest. This was evidently a fantastic change in terms of potentials for a better material well-being for all. This huge amelioration of potential was the real progress. But this progress has been side-tracked by private interests. Instead of serving the common good and aiming at producing what was necessary, the industrial revolution turned out to become the mighty lever that established the economic power and the social and political prestige of the richer part of the bourgeoisie in producing as much as possible (overproduction)

for the simple purpose of profit and wealth accumulation. Instead of offering an improvement for the whole society based on the satisfaction of true needs, it became the tool of an increased domination and control of a wealthy minority over the larger part of the population that became the working class or even the starving class.

The fascination for the new possibilities offered by increased means of production, and the consequent obsession for overproduction and wealth accumulation that ensued out of this new power, transformed the whole culture. From this time is mainly dating the present huge increase of many forms of imbalances: in social contrast between rich and poor, in differentiation of social opportunities offered to each class, in pollution and destruction of nature, in exhaustion of natural resources, in huge surpluses in goods and capital that need ever newer and wider outlets, etc. to which we have still not attempted to find solutions so far today. From this time also are dating incredible improvements in general of our material conditions of living, at least in our western countries.

Clearly this material evolution is narrowly linked with the two precedent ones concerning Renaissance and Colonisation. A deep change of mind, more focused on material values, was taking the pre-eminence over social and cultural life. The awareness of sacredness and the option for clear ethical values were obscured by the seductive power of machinery and trade. The increased production of good, made possible not only by the new forms of energy and the consequent invention of performing machines but also by the new resources that had become accessible through colonisation, transformed fundamentally the market into an outlet for the excessive quantities of products that had to find buyers. Production was not only geared by what was necessary, i.e. generally defined by the

quantity of goods and services that the basic needs of the surrounding population would require, but, instead, overproduction became the dominant leading measure that “needed” the market also to be transformed in order to find outlets for this excess of goods, of course under conditions that should provide profit. This profit, generated more by the quantities of goods in play than by astute speculation, allowed the owners of these mighty production’s means to increase their own investments in order to produce still more. Growth became the essential factor of this system based on profitability and “endless” extension that one calls capitalism. This double contradiction of growth and overproduction is characterising ever more our present trade system today, supported by increasing credit, i.e. growing debt, whether economic or ecological.

In the same way as the social hierarchy is reinforced by an increasing contrast in power, similarly the power of the wealthy class is consolidated proportionally to the quantity of goods, capital and machinery which are involved. Paradoxically this is not a general penury of necessities that generates a contrast of wealth between the haves and the have-nots but it is on the contrary an (over)abundance of riches that creates this stratification. A stronger economic growth fosters a sharper stratification of social classes when it reinforces the differences of wealth and power. The richer the upper class became, the poorer the worker class. Economics, i.e. wealth, capital, market and technology, had taken over and became the leading forces over direct human concerns such as solidarity, friendship, joy, love and equity.

As for colonisation a discourse had to be developed to justify this new evolution and explain why richer people could become rich and why poorer people had to become poor. Amazingly this discourse was inspired by the racial discourse used to justify colonisation. The

upper class was declared to be apart because of higher birth and because it had received special gifts that were linked with its belonging to an upper category of people, an upper race. There were a few theories at that time, like the theses by Count Arthur de Gobineau⁸, which tried to explain that the upper class was in fact nothing else but another race. It allowed, in the eyes of privileged people of that time, to justify why they were privileged. Indeed privilege was just, in this new discourse, a right of nature and not a shocking result of uninhibited exploitation.

The Industrial Revolution marks a powerful turn in the evolution of our anthropology, i.e. what matters most in our life. Not that, before the revolution, it was just all idyllic and, after it, all terrible. But evidently this fundamental social structural change liberated powerful forces, as much technical or financial as well as also social and psychological, that would take the lead of our development. What previously was not possible did not pose any problem; there was no such radical choice whether to succumb or not to the power of material attraction and seduction of wealth. But after the great transformation everything seemed possible. The new realms of energy and technology, allied to the forces of finance and market, seemed to be able to bring pure happiness to the privileged classes. The new possibilities were promising endless developments. This was the gain, at least if one belonged to these privileged classes.

But the loss of this Revolution is certainly that it did not integrate into these new potentials an ethical and social requirement to make it accessible for all and limited to our “real” needs, under the rule of reciprocal care and wish for maximal equity and equilibrium with the

8 Comte Arthur de Gobineau: *The Inequality of the Human Races*, published in French in 1853 and quoted by Hanna Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

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natural context. It would have been indeed possible to use these new means for the well-being of all, in a spirit of solidarity. This was a truly powerful force that was liberated by these new means and it was therefore necessary to design an equally powerful social process that would control these forces in order to ensure that they would consolidate society in its thriving evolution instead of generating a form of hidden civil war under the cover of social competition. The choice was: solidarity or struggle. And it is the latter that has been chosen, not because it was preferable but because it served the illusory interest of the minority in power, more by lack of imagination and maturity than by real choice of what was best.

This is indeed the meaning of life that is here at stake. What is the purpose in our existence: accumulate wealth for oneself or create harmonious relationships between living beings? This dilemma shows how much it is the role of a society to keep its economic forces in check and, at the same time, to restrict the excessive freedom of the most powerful people who have control over them. This is precisely the role of democracy to establish the right priorities and design the political and legal instruments that will allow social and ethical maturity to remain in control of economics. Economics is not a master; it is only an instrument for a purpose, i.e. for the wellbeing of all and the equality that allows each one to have a share of what is provided and created in community. Halas, at the Industrial Revolution the law of competition (Yang) took over the genuine development of social maturity and the ability of society to choose the quality of development it wished (Yin). We just lost the sense of what matters most for our community life: nothing more than the joy of being. Being requires indeed only a very limited availability of goods. Do we really need to let competition and exploitation destroy the harmony of our relationships and lose for ever the fundamental sense of being that Life relies upon?

6) Loss of community

Exploitation imposes the law of individualism and destroys our sense of belonging to, and caring freely for, a wider community.

The imperialist invasion of southern countries has been fostered by the excess of goods and capital overproduction that needed to find “opportunities” outside the too narrow frame of the mother country. The true exploitation of the colonies and the rivalries between Europeans nations in America, Africa, Asia or Australia were a clear expression of this trend to invade more land, exploit more resources and people and extend possibilities for trade and investments to the limits of the Earth. It is difficult to see a positive aspect in this evolution except the fact that the explorers discovered more of these fascinating countries and could have created extremely rich exchanges with indigenous people and other civilisations if they had considered them as equal with respect and in reciprocity. This lack of recognition is evidently the great loss of this step that should have led forward.

This step cumulated the negative aspects of colonisation, of racism and social domination as well as greed for resources and goods beyond any consideration of keeping in balance with what the environment (as well social as natural) could provide. True economy is based on cycles and on the necessity to give back to the source. This obligation is not only ethical but it is just simply dictated by common sense: nature has to reconstitute its own products, people need to be supported and fed materially as well as spiritually and wealth has to return to the source in the same quantity as it has been received from this source. This is a main law of economy that is always forgotten: wealth has to circulate in circles to avoid that one

gets poorer and the other wealthier. Any form of exploitation long term finishes by killing indeed the goose that lays the golden eggs, because the drainage of wealth exhausts the source which cannot produce any fruit anymore, at the big disappointment of the beneficiaries.

Imperialism has created a very different situation in the colonies from what it has developed at home. In the 19th century, after the French Revolution, there is a general movement towards more democracy, i.e. a wide struggle for the power of the bourgeoisie to conquer and to dominate the economic, social and political scene, and, on a more radical scene, many attempts by the Jacobin movement to establish a society of equality that would empower the whole population, i.e. not only the bourgeoisie but also the whole lot of simple workers and citizens. It means that the old autocratic pattern of the previous centuries is questioned and politics has to play according to tighter rules inspired, in still very conflicting ways, by a general democratic aspiration that believes in true equality and empowerment of all. But the scene in the colonies looks very different from what it is at home. In these newly conquered territories under western domination there is no democratic rule as it is understood in western context.

The invading forces govern by administrative power in a completely subjective way, without reference to the civil laws that usually regulate social life in the mother country. This other frame of reference which relies on pure contrast of power and interests instead of being defined by an objective legal frame, allows any devious decision to be taken and enforced; this is evidently the consequence of invasion and of the inability of the new power to establish a regime governed by laws when the situation is so tense and the indigenous population is understandably so defensive. The conquering forces have declared themselves as government in the

name of racism and civilisation, creating de facto a society with two different logics, i.e. the top western stratum for the dominating foreign elite (Creoles, Pieds Noirs) and the lower indigenous stratum for the dominated local population, yet at the exception of the local collaborating elite. These two different and incompatible patterns of government, that are applied one at home and the other in the colonies, never stop clashing one with another: the former acts according to law - which is in principle stable and constant and aims at equality of treatment for all - and the latter acts through decrees - which are by essence arbitrary and geared unilaterally by the interests of the governing class, i.e. without legal framework except the power of the administration. This sharp contrast serves naturally the interests of the invading country but the colonial system cannot be practised in complete independence from what happens at home, and reciprocally.

The evident lack of clear ethical references for the colonial power - whose interest is to dispossess indigenous people and to exploit most natural and social resources - cannot avoid having strong repercussion at home. Public opinion in the mother country strives to have the human rights of indigenous respected and the government pays lip service to this generous idea but is completely out of control of what happens indeed in the colonies. It well tries to edict instructions for the respect of indigenous but this is only pretence aiming at presenting a philanthropic image that is yet in complete contradiction with the interests of colonists and with the fact itself of imperialism whose real aim is just a form of radical exploitation that is completely incompatible with the respect of any rights. The negative impact of this western inextinguishable thirst for foreign economic conquest has deeply affected our western society. We can still now observe how it is evolving towards a radicalisation of these trends through a form of globalisation that is geared nowadays almost

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only by economic forces focused on maximum profit, i.e. exploitation and injustice, paradoxically at the expense of the wider populations of these same western societies that see their life conditions decay rapidly when competition destroys the quality of life in local communities.

The self-centredness I have just described earlier becomes in this adventure pure blindness. It just ignores the context that provides everything: nature as the great Mother, people as the creative forces and energies that allow a network of true relationships to take shape and the transformation of resources into goods to happen according to needs. Most of all it denies the essential dimension of community as a wider body of interdependence of all with all, whether nature, rocks, plants, animals, people, climatic forces, sun energy, all great natural equilibrium, etc.

The excessive development of individualism – whether at the level of the single person or at the level of the class or the corporation – generates this blindness that kills our natural and social environment and destroys the laws of balance. The present trend is even so destructive that it does not even answer properly the expectations of its agents, as it brings with it so many side effects that reduce considerably the efficiency of the system. Equality can indeed be proved as being the best way to generate general wellbeing. This primitive and individualistic way of looking for the short term and material interest (Yang) plays at the cost of a deeper experience of life as a network of relationships where reciprocal care is the basic rule (Yin). Without this care for one another or this care to return to the source what has been given so generously by nature and the others and then received so wonderfully by each of us, there is no more community. We live then as just single atoms that have lost their own centre. The loss of community is a tragedy of our modern

society whose functioning has been reduced to the laws of economics and profit.

I will return later to this topic of community in more detail because it is central in our practice of more human values. In a nutshell I can just summarize here that the economic system in which we are living has so much intensified the use of money for all kinds of exchanges and especially for satisfying most of our current needs (from survival to health, leisure time and culture) that we find ourselves, as persons, expelled from the true network of living human direct relationships that do not depend on money. We need therefore to reconquer that faculty of relating to one another without intermediary and to reinvent how to do that, i.e. how to make alive a network of subsistence based essentially on relationships between people that would not be (only) a network of economic exchanges.

I not only believe that another alternative exists which allows community to thrive - and it means to care for this dimension if we want it to be fruitful - but I am also convinced that a true solidarity in community would bring much more happiness to all of us, probably with less stuff but at least with more joy. And certainly in a material setting that would be economically much healthier and also much more efficient.

Two opposed trends clearly appear here: on the one hand, the dominant trend (Yang) is based on individualism and competition that delete the importance of community and, on the other hand, the recessive trend (Yin) attempts to make community alive and to generate the true consensus that empowers each of us and helps us to find our own unique place and role in the local community.

7) Loss of empowerment

The globalisation of market has generated an anonymous economic system that focuses on things and makes people locally powerless.

Globalisation is only the further extension of what has prepared the contemporary trend to open all human activities to economic competition in order to extend market possibilities, especially in the advantage of richer countries which lead the movement. This opening could be considered in a positive way if it were done for more human reasons than economic ones and if care would be taken to allow each culture to be heard and respected in their great diversity. But the trend works exactly in the contrary direction because it extends the commercial exchanges and the consumption of the same goods for all of us, without considering how much it answers real needs, and without regard whether it furthers our own human, cultural, spiritual development and helps us to reinforce our identity. Indeed globalisation is a form of hidden standardisation that levels differences and imposes a kind of lowest denominator's grade of development that kills diversity. What could have been the win has become the cause of the big loss.

I have mentioned earlier the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as the accomplished form of this general trend of extension of trade possibilities that makes a business out of anything, even war. The complete lack of moral restraint makes such an open conquest of new fields for the exercise of power a phenomenon that is accepted or at least tolerated internationally by most governments. The law of force and power overrides any other attempt to make relationships more human. This is truly the abolition of the community dimension I just described. Competition and force have become the true masters of our world.

The awareness of belonging and the attempt to forge a consensus in the local community are the means for each member to be empowered to express their most personal beliefs and expectations and to be also recognised by the other members for each contribution or expression of creativity or work. It is clear that this possibility for empowerment is only possible when the local community is protected from external attempts of domination or control and when community can find its own ways to establish any authentic attempt of consensus. This protection of the local community is based on the care that the whole community expresses for each member. Without this basic care for one another there is no real community because the law of competition is then acting freely. Consensus, when it is reached in a sufficient proportion and when it is focused on the quality of relationships between members of the community, is the only means to protect this capacity for human care which is indeed the key for local prosperity and human wellbeing. This is a fundamental difference from the general pattern of economic development we have adopted so far.

The evolution of these last decades has reinforced the tendency for wider competition. The Malian cotton farmer is in direct competition with the US farmer, despite the fact that the latter lives under a much more clement sky, uses the last technology and receives even state subsidies, while the former struggles with climate change, has not much more than his own physical strength and a few simple tools to provide the necessary means for production and is hardly supported by his nation's administration. Competition has established the power of price. In a striking short and imbecile summary decisions are taken on short term mainly in calculating how much profit the different options could bring. Delocalisation is the principal way this increase in profit is made possible, and the goods come back onto the local market after having been produced by conditions that have nothing to

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do with the usual constraints of what is affordable locally. Not only the salaries paid in these far remote countries are much lower but also all regulations concerning human and worker rights or aiming at a protection of the environment are much weaker. Our local businesses cannot compete anymore and they have to close down. The general consequence of this trend is that the bigger businesses extend their power internationally while the local small businesses cannot survive. Local employment collapses and people are forced, by lack of local products, to buy these foreign goods that precisely generated their own demise. Even their income decreases and makes consumption more and more difficult.

We are not used to link globalisation with overproduction, yet this is properly the real cause and the main motor for the development of open competition. The motivation of the capitalist system is indeed based on (over)quantities: (over)quantity of goods, (over)quantity of capital, (over)quantity of workers and (over)quantity of consumers. Nothing is measured according to needs because benefits are only made possible by the addition of small profits in a maximum number of items that makes the consideration of true needs irrelevant. To allow the law of (over)quantities to work, market needs to extend and find ever new consumers. As there is overproduction prices have to be kept as low as possible in order to override competition. Salaries must then be reduced as much as possible to liberate this margin of profit that, after multiplication by huge numbers, allows investors (stock exchange) yielding a maximum benefit. The workers are evidently the first victims of this maximisation of benefit. Through the “magic” of delocalisation the local population comes into competition with other workers at the other end of the world who live in completely different conditions (climate, political regime, human rights, worker protection, ecological conditions, etc.).

And, far more, this economic system and way of thinking are doomed to destroy themselves. By depriving workers and consumers – they are the same persons! – of a solid income by preventing them from getting well-paid jobs it deprives them also from their capacity to consume which is the main basic principle on which the system can thrive. In other words, by draining the system of its wealth through the extraction of any possible benefit (excessive profits, stock exchanges, excessive remuneration at the top), it drains the system of its blood. This is a principle of classic economics: wealth has to circulate in order to generate more wealth. When it is accumulated and stored, it drains the body of its vital energy.

When activities are delocalised elsewhere or when China becomes the workshop of the world, our local workshops cannot survive anymore and the corresponding know-how vanishes, it means the real local network of interdependence and knowledge (skills) inside the local community is killed and products and services have to be imported. The production-consumption system becomes progressively a huge and anonymous machine. Nobody knows any more who produces what. All goods are in competition on world level and on the different markets. Through its never ending extension such a system becomes completely impersonal, especially when one compares it with the local market or with the exchanges with local trade people, when we know who does what, and how good and trustworthy each one is.

In consequence we buy at the supermarket goods that are made somewhere in conditions we ignore and with a calculated degree of quality that is reduced to the minimum necessary for the product to be sold nevertheless (inbuilt obsolescence). The design and the care brought to production are mainly geared by the hope for a maximum

profit and have therefore nothing to do with the satisfaction of the client or user.

The financial system that supports and accompanies the extension of market potentials becomes more and more preponderant. The proportion of GDP due to income through speculation tends to increase powerfully while the proportion of GDP due to income through work tends to diminish drastically. It means that the share of workers involved in direct production is decreasing while the profit of financial actors (investors, stock exchange, speculators, etc.) is increasing. Speculation is slowly replacing work in all its forms (paid, independent, shadow work, subsistence) According to the World Bank the average added value from manufacturing for the whole world has been reduced from 21,3% of the GDP in 1995 to only 14.9% of the GDP in 2014, i.e. the loss of proportionally one big quarter of its relative value in less than 20 years. During the same time the financial sector (personal remittances, received, in US\$) developed from US\$102,4bn in 1995 to 552.0bn in 2014, i.e. more than 5 times more in less than 20 years. It was only 1.9bn in 1970, i.e. almost 300 times smaller than what it is today! This radical change shows how much impact the present evolution has on working conditions: not only on salaries but also on all conditions (security, rights, social protection) and especially on the meaning of the activities and chances for the workers to feel valorised.

The sad thing – when we forget it – or the good thing – when we remember it and use this too often neglected and unknown power - is that we are nevertheless the main actors in this evolution because we remain the consumers and we accept to choose what we consume according to the law of the cheapest price. Yet we know that each time we buy Chinese goods we participate in destroying our own local empowerment to produce what we need according to our own

level of need. On the other hand we know very well that the cheap price is due to bad quality because these cheap goods are meant to last as little as possible, precisely in the name of their cheap price and bad quality and by greed to sell as much as possible again and again. Because we participate in this unjust system, we become in this way collaborators of our own agony. We participate by ignorance, laziness and lack of thinking in our own demise. Yet the object of our neglect can also become the tool of our power when we use our participation as a means for change and empowerment. This is the positive fact.

The tragedy is not only the deterioration of the local economy with its huge loss in skills and traditions, or loss in the intensity of reciprocal connexions that made local life something so rich. The loss is not so much the fact – which is already in itself an unbelievable bankruptcy - that all products one can consume locally are made in China in an extremely bad quality aimed at more consumption as each good has to be soon thrown away and replaced. The great cataclysm consists in the fact that the people who live locally, and are working usually hard to make a living for themselves and their own families, are no more able to do so because of external influences that define most of their working or consumption conditions due to decisions which are taken elsewhere by powerful interests which escape completely their control. They find themselves completely disempowered and lose also the means that their own work and local involvement had previously provided and which was the source of their own self-esteem and social recognition.

I believe that this is the central point of our present evolution. Our modern society, i.e. our political and economic leaders, have so much developed the trend for globalisation that it comes now to a general collapse where the dignity of local workers, consumers and citizens is

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completely negated. People have been made simple cogs in an economic system where they are sold on the market as workforce or consumers. Their human face is no more visible. This is the great shame and the great disempowerment. They cannot control their life anymore. They cannot choose anymore which their priorities are. And the market machine with its ideology of infinite growth encourages them to adapt in the name of the illusion to find more happiness when more goods become available. Resentment grows in consequence that brings violence or extreme right-wing regimes to succeed with their destructive populist politics of hatred and rejection.

3) THE PATH OF LIBERATION

After describing how masculinity has imposed its laws and especially its ways to apprehend life, we need to find the way out of this simplistic and destructive attitude. We can call this way the path of liberation because it opens us to a new understanding of life, or more exactly to a systematic questioning of all that we believe in order to free ourselves from false constructs which have imposed themselves through our monolithic understanding of life as a urge for control of what we do not know because it remains a deep mystery. The path of systematic interrogation shows us the path of liberation. Let's see why and how.

A way out of domination and expulsion

The boomerang effect

Our western society has developed a powerful capacity to dominate but domination does not act only on the other: it fires back.

I have described earlier about colonisation how the use of two different forms of rule has created a disparity of treatment between people in the home country and indigenous people in the overseas conquered territories. The former are governed by law, i.e. by a rule that is in principle the same for all people. The latter are ruled by decrees that manage each situation case by case according to the will of the administrator (governor) and the interests of the dominating power, i.e. everybody is being treated in a different way. This form of disparity and injustice has strong repercussions, not only in the colonies but also in the mother country. Democracy itself is at stake.

What a nation does is modelled by the maturity of the humanist spirit that impregnates the nation and impacts inevitably on the quality of interaction between the different agents in the home country, whether they are institutions, parties, corporations, churches, clubs, associations or people.

There can be no injustice that is done to indigenous people in the colonies that does not impact also on the way people behave in the mother country. Any practice of injustice will immediately backfire. It starts of course by provoking a reaction of the most humanly motivated people at home. It becomes then soon a part of the public debate. People can be partisans by generosity, by personal interest or by fear; in any case national morality cannot be divided into two, one at home and one abroad. This is evidently the same spirit that leads the action and that is also shaped back by the repercussions. This remains true today - even if colonialism is in principle a fact of the past - when domination has taken another form of expression through the implication of corporate interests and more or less direct intervention by the most powerful governments into national issues of poorer countries. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq has well illustrated this fact in the deep repercussions it had in Europe and the USA: moral issues, power struggle, violence, racism, refugees, terrorism, etc.

This boomerang effect means that domination is not only a way to assert power. Power allows exploitation and profit at short term, but it also shapes the attitude of the actors and transforms their perceptions of the situation: the situation they intend to master but also the way they look at it and the nature of the interests they intend to defend or promote. One says that power corrupts. It not only allows domination and control to extend, but it also impacts on the mentality of the dominator when he turns into an ever more arrogant

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and daring actor with ever less restraint. The many apparent successes – apparent! - of our rich northern countries in dominating other poorer southern countries and in exploiting their resources or finding over there some new outlets has seemed to confirm that our action was adapted and worth being developed further. Our way of thinking and acting seemed therefore to be consolidated. It worked economically as it allowed us to accumulate more wealth and it became politically a way of thinking in terms of eternal growth. The market machine seemed doomed to expand for ever. From imperialism that used to focus mainly on countries overseas we passed over to globalisation (neo-imperialism) that tends now to apply the market machine to all of us.

The boomerang effect consists in the fact that the tendency for extensive domination does not make distinctions between nations, classes, races, genders. We all become possible targets of a general will for domination and control. The boomerang effect is precisely based on the fact that the Yang tendencies are liberated without being restrained or controlled or guided by Yin perceptions that would care for the meaning and long term consequences of what is undertaken. The effect is meant to be immediate and profitable.

From the human point of view we become all losers in this evolution because, even if we can accumulate more stuff, we nevertheless lose our own humanity and capacity to relate to one another as human beings. We become all slaves of an anonymous market machine. This does not mean that the machine has its own will to oppress each of us. No, it just means that we have participated in an evolution that finally escaped our control. We have been feeding a trend that had to fulfil our expectations but that did not. Objectively it can be probably shown that the colonial experience did not create wealth except it allowed some people to become rich. It just allowed indeed to

concentrate wealth, at a very high cost for the metropolitan state and of course the colonies.

Evidently this evolution is not just the fruit of chance and necessity. It is also geared by very precise interests and intentions by main actors who have direct interests in this transformation. There are evidently main actors who have a very precise idea of where they want to go. This is not just an awkward evolution that we cannot control. The ejection of our persons out of life by this market machine is intended as much as it happens. This truth is central yet I am convinced that we are all losers, including the main actors who maybe get more power and wealth out of this process but who also lose as much humanity as we do. This is for me one of the main lessons to be learned out of our observations. It means we have to liberate ourselves from the domination of this spiritless machine: we, who are the ejected beings, as well as the main actors, who are the people in position of privilege they defend harshly although this privileged position harms them too.

Although we are all the victims of this form of oppression, we are yet not all equal in responsibility, power, intention and privileges. Some act intentionally and get privileges but lose their humanity without being aware of it. Some act and are disappointed because they do not get what has been promised to them. Some believe they get something when indeed they get almost nothing and lose most of what is essential. Some do not get anything and are stripped of all they had. As we are all actors and victims - yet at very different levels - all the combinations are possible.

On the other hand, there are the facts and the way these facts are perceived and interpreted. Each one tries to evaluate their own situation and judges how much they have been winners or losers.

There is often a big gap between the facts and how they are understood. This new consideration adds, to my previous enumeration, all the categories of people who believe they are winners when they are indeed losers, or the categories of people who expect patiently something that never happens. It is striking how much our economic and social system is consolidated by so many illusions that allow it to survive and develop. Advertisements create a false culture of false expectations. Fashion proposes values that are hoaxes. Happiness is presented as the fruit of acquisition, while truly happiness is rather the path than the end destination. Promises are made that encourage sacrifices that are never rewarded. Our market society relies truly on inversions of the meaning of life that are never blankly revealed and not even perceived.

In principle we live in democracies that should offer equal opportunities to all. The usual discourse about modernity promises us opportunities for self-development, for true relationships, for joy and pleasure, for expression and recognition, for wellbeing also. Yet little of all this happens to each of us when we rely on the market machine to provide these qualities to us. As Pankaj Mishra⁹ describes it, there is a huge resentment nowadays among all the citizens of these rich nations who hardly can ensure their subsistence in a society of abundance. There is a huge anger that is growing and shows itself in resignation and disaffection in elections or expresses itself in far-right votes. Scapegoats are chosen to side-track popular anger: refugees, minorities, etc. Fear is thoroughly generated and exploited because people who are afraid are easier to manipulate. Medias follow the dominant trend instead of becoming the mirror that reveals the true picture.

9 Pankaj Mishra: *Age of Anger – a History of the Present*. Allen Lane, 2017.

Expulsion

The global market has destroyed our local ability to relate in a personal way for matters that concern our daily subsistence.

The consequence of this whole evolution of globalisation is that the economic production and market system develop as an anonymous machine that expels us as fully living human beings but keeps a grip on us as simple functions of workers and consumers. This drastically reduced role to a function measured by money is nevertheless essential for the survival of this system because this machine could not work without our participation: it needs our time and our money, yet it remains completely indifferent to our life conditions. In the present anonymous system we can observe how diversification, specialisation, complementarity, exchanges happen without implicating us humanly but only in most cases through the exclusive intermediary of money, whether for a reward (salary) or an expense (price to be paid or taxes). The system is closed on itself. It is meant to satisfy all our needs without us being involved because it does not allow our qualitative participation in terms of human aptitudes. Money is the unique intermediary and yardstick and it has replaced most kinds of exchanges that were still loaded with human sentiments and any value of gift.

In traditional societies, the scale of exchanges used to remain much reduced because of the small number of people involved and everybody knew more or less everybody. Of course less goods were on offer and the prices were probably higher (it is not even sure!) for a nevertheless much better quality that would have to last almost for ever, especially with the possibility of repairing what was broken or worn out. Traditionally work and trade have always been opportunities for human relationships on the local market. They

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involved not only goods and services but also personal qualities and personified touch in relationships between producers and consumers, trade people and their clients, professionals such as doctors, pharmacists, shoemakers, watchmakers, lawyers, etc, and the beneficiaries of their services.

Nowadays, because of the anonymity of commercial exchanges compensated exclusively by money exchange, human relationships are rejected into the field of leisure. We find still many opportunities to meet our neighbours but it is for a drink or a meal and rarely for sharing work or produces in a way that is involved at the heart of our activities for subsistence. This form of process that ejects our human relationships out of the network of subsistence and current activities makes our communication between people more unreal. It means that we need to reconquer in a personified way the field of these subsistence exchanges if we want our relationships inside the local community to get back the flesh and liveliness it used to have and to become again as dynamic and human as they were.

Leisure time is a good time to have a chat with a drink but it never can create conditions that allow each one to be real in the way we need if we want to be able to communicate deeply one with another. It is evident that, to develop true relationships, we need them to extend on as many levels as possible in order to touch as many layers of our being as it can be, instead of being reduced to simple leisure time spent together.

In this purpose we need to go back to a form of protectionism that would allow a minimum of control on the impact of external powers; it means that this protection does not consist in building a wall around each community to isolate it from any possible external influence. True protectionism is only meant to put in place the

minimum means of control that are necessary to allow diversity of conditions being respected and not endangered. When Malian and US farmers have to compete economically although they live under drastically opposed climatic conditions, it is evidently absurd. It is evident that the Malian farmer will always be the loser. It is urgent that his fragility be recognised. It is not only about the production of cotton but also and mainly about human dignity. This is indeed the true measure of protectionism to protect human dignity, to allow good local working and living conditions, to allow people to be socially recognised and esteemed for what they provide for their local community. Work is meant to ensure our subsistence but, I believe, it is still more meant to provide us with social recognition and to create social links. Work is maybe nothing else than a pretext to develop the sense of community as our further stage of evolution.

This need for a minimum of protectionist measures is only the first step. It is only the visible expression of the necessity to protect the local community or to even protect the feminine attitude for care. We need urgently also to rethink our priorities. We have let the economy lead us to bankruptcy in the name of the illusion of material wellbeing, in our thirst for profit and accumulation. We have lost the thread of life. We can easily observe nowadays how a huge part of population of our so-called rich countries lives under threat of losing their jobs. Open international competition has destroyed our life conditions. In Europe of the 50s people felt much more secure than now although they had probably much less. They knew at least what was influencing their life conditions and there were still many possibilities on the local political level to control more or less what was happening locally when the local culture was based on true democracy.

It is striking today to observe how many people have lost their identity by lack of being recognised by their local community. They are altogether forming huge indistinct masses of unemployed or marginalised people. The word “mass” is in this case very pejorative but it expresses just what it is and the underlying problem. As these people have lost their own identity and their ability to be seen and recognised and socially validated, they become identity less and merge into a mass of unknown and indistinguishable beings that have lost their sense of meaning. This is a tragedy in itself.

But the worse of this evolution is that these people do not see any way out of their situation. They can more or less identify the causes of the sharp degradation of their life conditions and they know that delocalisation and competition and dehumanisation have set them in a wild world that does not care for them and is ready to extract from them all the substance it can without any respect for the human being who lives in them.

Most of our international politics, from the international trade agreements to the military interventions into foreign countries, has served the wide project of globalisation which is meant to serve the profit of the most powerful interests worldwide. But the project brings misery at home for the people who are simple workers and who have been disempowered. They cannot see in their own life any way out of this drama. They vote against the habitual leaders who have led them to this dead end but, mainly by lack of real alternatives, they are often seduced by the extreme right movements that promise them to get them out of there.

This is of course the great illusion. These far-right movements have built only an image of a world where everybody would be equal, but this is only a fiction that is fed by hate and fear of the others, i.e. built

on nothing real or positive as a political project. It is why this image is a pure fiction. It is not a positive and responsible answer to the present situation but it is only an idea that is disconnected from reality and based on rejection and fright.

This is precisely the main quality of totalitarian movements to create this fiction of a mass movement that seems to be unified around a same project, but this project is purely negative. Paradoxically, the unity of this movement (before it becomes a movement) is indeed already realised at the present moment, in negative, by a common absence of identity for all these same people who have already lost any ability to be seen and recognised for whom they are. Totalitarian movements are precisely based on this hope of each individual to become someone because one melts into a wider movement that is based on this unity for which each one pays the price of their own identity. Such unity is not constructive as it is based on destruction and negation of oneself; it is why such a movement is called to become violent. And it is precisely what totalitarian movements do: violence becomes their essence, in terms of destruction and annihilation of being, as means to consolidate the power of the movement over the movement. This destruction is powerful because it prevents life to develop, inasmuch as it prevents the authentic differentiation that would be, by contrast, the proper quality of true community.

By contrast with the totalitarian movement, diversity and complementarity based on differentiation are the characteristics that constitute indeed the true energies that build real community. This fundamental difference shows how much the type of unity that unifies the totalitarian movement on the base of destruction of personality is deeply opposed to the real quality that would valorise

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each member and generate true community rooted in the practice of diversity and complementarity.

I believe that the only way out of this frightening menace of totalitarianism being back is to rebuild community, based on human and personified relationships and on differentiation, i.e. on the recognition of what each member brings to their social context. This means of course a form of protectionism that is minor but nevertheless measured on the local qualities that can only thrive if they are protected. It is all about the protection of faculties, aptitudes, skills and attitudes that can thrive locally only if they receive the necessary protection. They are these feminine (Yin) qualities I have already mentioned that care for the wellbeing of all. This “maternal” care and attention have to be reintroduced as major conditions for our common wellbeing. This requires the implementation of these Yin qualities that are recessive but can yet express themselves because the community cares for the fact it can be done.

Protectionism becomes the way to create this protected space where Yin qualities can express themselves without being repressed by materialistic oriented dominant forces. Protectionism is in this way not at all about building a high wall of protection. It does not shut the doors to external influences, to migrants, to refugees, to foreign exchanges. It is not a form of protectionism that isolates. It is only a filter that cares that all exchanges happen in a healthy way that brings more life and does not endanger what is fragile and wants to live.

Discovering the dimension of community

Community, the next step of our evolution, will propose new forms of human relationships based on land, belonging and consensus.

I have described earlier how we have lost the sense of what a true local community is. It means that we need now to rediscover it. Community is much more than just the quantity of people who live locally and share the same services (shopping centre, pub, public services); this is the dimension in depth of a group of people who care for one another and share a common destiny that they have to manage together. Community is not possible without the search for a common consensus that would encompass the needs of all members. Of course this consensus can never be perfect and absolute, but the search for it is certainly the way to be as perfect as possible in the attempt to generate peace and joy and equality.

Community is the further stage of our human development as Teilhard de Chardin so well described it. In the whole movement of evolution of our human species community is the next stage where we develop further beyond the limits of our own individual physicality and we create links between people and all sentient beings in order to form a wider body that already exists through the many exchanges of interdependence but needs to be deepened to give expression to all immaterial dimensions of our life such as peace, care, justice, equity, love, etc. Community provides our roots and identity because it fosters our belonging to a place and its living community, i.e. all sentient beings.

The land is the true nourishing Mother. We belong to the land more than it belongs to us. We have to rediscover how much nature and the land are shaping us, more than we are the masters of them. They are our roots. They are the skeleton of our community. Without them the local community has no true support and material expression. They would be floating. The problem of the present mobility we have got accustomed to in our modern technological world is that it makes us illusorily believe that we are detached entities. It is not true; this is

only an illusion when we are reduced to identify with our body, mind and memory. Indeed we are much more than this physical mobile entity and we can only discover these other wider dimensions of our being and make them more graspable and experiential when we recognise the way we belong. We belong to the land that supports us physically, food wise, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. We belong to the local community of which we are necessary parts and on which we depend for our surviving. This community includes the whole range of sentient beings that live on the land; it means it includes the animals and plants which are all parts of the same community as we, as human beings, are parts of.

We forget too often that the community which is defined by the local belonging to the land includes all types of living beings because we are all interconnected and complementary. This network of interdependency is real; it gets hidden nowadays behind the exchanges of money because money tends to replace relationships; money makes relationships unnecessary when everything is paid for. Yet these relationships still continue to exist although they are hidden behind financial exchanges and therefore reduced to the poorest part of what they represent: their just material and functional aspect. Belonging is a rich dimension of our life, when it means being in relationship with a wide network that provides us with our subsistence and nourishes us on most different levels of our being.

Belonging does not mean identifying. It is rather the awareness of being a part of something wider and the attempt to make it alive. This attempt concentrates its effort on making this link grow. The next stage of our evolution calls us to intensify these links between one another as this is the natural stage of development of our species. We learn in this way how to deepen our reciprocal relationships without needing to have chosen the people with whom we do so. They are

just given by the fact we live on the same land or territory. Land connects us; it is the network of our relationships and the potential of further future developments because it situates people in a same context where they have to or may interact. Belonging in this way is much diversified. It does not impose any identity onto us because we learn, and are free, to belong in our own way, each one as a special part that is different from the others and in this way complementary.

Community, as a further stage of development in the evolution of mankind, is a more complex and evolved stage of development that unifies by differentiation. True community is not based on a melting down of differences but precisely on the contrary, i.e. an infinite differentiation that increases diversity and creates more links of complementarity and interdependence. A true body is made of organs that are very different and need one another. The heart needs the lungs to bring oxygen, the hand needs the eyes to guide it, and the hand needs the heart to remain alive, etc. The chain of interdependence never stops and relies on specialisation but also on the ability of each one to be related to all others.

These diversity, complementarity and interdependency mean that the community has to care for each member as each member has to care for community. Our personal wellbeing is not in competition with the wellbeing of others but on the contrary dependent on the quality of life we can share in the community. It means that the more we care for each other the more harmoniously community can evolve and be broader, it means be also more able to provide each one with what they need. In our modern society we have replaced this form of reciprocal care by exchanges that go through money. This is a terrible impoverishment. Money is just a means to measure how far exchanges are balanced. It cannot do more and especially cannot encompass the whole range of intensity that animates human

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relationships. In our families we have learned to care and to be generous. We thrive in proportion to the care we give to each one. In our neighbourhood it is the same and we experience it every day. On the level of the local community there is no reason why it should be different, except that we are shy or afraid to be so open and trustful because we have less control. We just need to offer and not worry about what will be received or not.

As we belong more deeply to our local community, we can be empowered to express what we believe is important for our common future. This expression by each member of our diversified needs and the imagination of how to satisfy them and how to live together generates a wider debate that aims at defining the basic conditions that have to be respected if we really want to achieve what has been proposed. In this purpose we need consensus; we need to identify how far each one of us can go to make concessions on the accessory aspects of our respective expectations in order to meet the other people of our community and form this so much needed consensus. Consensus is evidently never achieved; it is never perfect, but it is the best type of agreement we can reach, knowing that anything we cannot agree upon inside the local community will be defined by external agents in their own interests.

The indestructible energy of Life

Materialism can repress the expression of Life but Life can never be destroyed. It remains the energy that will bring us back to Life.

In what I just described of the rich potentials of true community one can see how far it contrasts with the short description I made above of our past human evolution. This summary was not done to rewrite history in my own way but to show how much we have lost on our

path of evolution the real consciousness of where we aim to. And we mainly lost it not because of what we have discovered but rather because of what we have abandoned by neglect and lack of awareness. We have to reconquer our own potentials.

Oppression and destruction have destroyed the most subtle qualities of our relationships. They leave us in a desert deprived of compassion and of the ability to give and receive. Our market mentality has invaded all corners of our life. It seems as if this anonymous system of power and trade that focuses only on materiality had excluded us and Life from our daily experience or at least repelled it to the private sphere. We need to reconnect with Life and its Source, and make out of it the core of our daily experience.

It is important to see that this destructive attack by materialistic energies is an attack on Life itself, but it is still more important to see that nothing can destroy Life. Life can be oppressed. It can be repressed. It can be prevented from expressing itself. But it never can be destroyed. Life is the true essence of the Universe. When winter comes it hibernates until spring and waits for liveable conditions to reappear.

In other words the message we have to learn from my previous description of these stages of evolution is that our main focus on materiality ejects Life from our lives but it does not destroy it. It deprives us from this quality which is the most important quality in our living experience because it is the source of what we are and of what we discover and of how we grow and evolve and are transformed by our life experience.

I not only described these stages of evolution but I affirmed also that the reason for this poor evolution, that consists in losing the most

precious discoveries of mankind, is the dominance of Yang aptitudes over Yin attitudes. It explains how Life - the true energy of what makes us truly alive - becomes recessive when it is confronted by controlling and repressing powers. This is a bad news but this is only the corollary of a good news that says that Life will come back as soon as we care for it. It means that for our liberation we need to cultivate Yin qualities in order to better channel our evolution and make of the meaning of life (Mary) the main guiding thread that leads to expression (John the Baptist), instead of reducing life to just a material issue.

Life itself becomes in this way the energy that shows the path. It is at the same time the oppressed dimension and the liberating force. When liberation is anchored in Life, it can only be true and authentic.

A need for a new anthropology

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The deep change of mentality (mind revolution) is: what was despised (Yin) becomes the leading value to be implemented (Yang).

There is no liberation without a revolution. This revolution does not need to be bloody and violent. It has preferably to be a revolution in our beings, in our minds and in the way we understand what is most precious and what has to become our leading thread. We have to rethink our priorities, but not only as such, i.e. as a hierarchy of values, but we have to review also the fundament of this construction. We need to dig into the subconscious basement of our philosophy and we have to correct the premises on which our society has functioned now for centuries. This deep process of review is not at all about discarding what we have acquired. It is mainly about

reorganising the structure when we change the main fundamentals of what matters in life.

The path of liberation cannot be just a refurbishing of what is. It is a necessary deep revolution in the whole way we think, we understand each other, we relate to each other and we rediscover our interdependence. Finally it is a new understanding of the meaning of life. We need to discover a new anthropology that proposes another meaning for our living together. This new search includes reviewing our relationships but it also includes reviewing how we relate to others who are different from us. The topic of diversity, as opposed to the trend of globalisation that standardises or the trend of domination that needs to create a victim, is a key issue in this search for new meanings. I will come back to this later as it is a fundamental aspect of this new search.

The path of liberation implies the rediscovery of truly human values as priorities that shape life as a search for mystery. It is indeed much more than a search for values. It is a search for a deep transformation of our beings and the way we experience life. It is much more radical than a change of values. It is a change of content, a change of meaning, a change of perception that reveals Life as something fundamentally different from what we believe it is when we trust the conventional wisdom of our days. Of course nobody is capable to explain what the meaning of life is. And we will never agree to explain it in a way that suits everybody. The meaning of life – I believe it is a wonderful quality of it – remains hidden and mysterious. What matters is not to grasp it solidly but it is to search for it. Grasping would mean in any case to squash it. The meaning of life is like a butterfly. You can chase it and wonder about it, but, as soon you grab it, you destroy it. Life and its meaning remain

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therefore always free and they can never be caught. This is probably what keeps us alive: mystery and wonder.

We will therefore never agree about the meaning of life. Consensus about the answer is not possible but we can agree about the necessity to search for it: consensus about the search. What matters here is not the answer but the question. The search is the essential. As long we continue to ask the question we will be able to remain fully alive and to wonder. And the common search will activate all feminine qualities of our human nature because these qualities are precisely about meaning. It will lead us to more meaning, even if it is not absolute.

This search for a new anthropology is a path of liberation. Liberation is a general term that concerns each of us in a different way. Yet I wish here to simplify because, although the way to liberation is the theme of these pages, I will concentrate on the guiding perceptions and meanings that will allow us to find the way out. Therefore I will limit my description of the path of liberation in concentrating on only two broad categories of people who are called to be going on the path of liberation: on one hand, the people of the conquered territories who want to find their own path of liberation and, on the other hand, the people in the mother country who suffer from the boomerang effect and their own illusions for wellbeing. Of course we can understand these two categories (mother country and conquered territories) only as historic realities or rather as metaphors for our present social reality (the dominating or controlling energy and the repressed or recessive Life quality). It will be easier to examine these two categories in the reversed order, starting with the latter one.

Now, before I start describing what can hardly be shown in a simple way, I wish to express a warning. I do not intend to propose a

readymade solution as if it could be proposed as such, but I only intend to describe a spirit, another mentality how to address this issue of liberation. Any attempt to propose solutions is doomed to fail. I wish just to depict another attitude. Life is about our attitude more than about what we achieve. The way we look at our present situation is what defines the way we interpret it and handle it. It is why a new spirit is necessary to find new ways of liberation. For this reason the following pages will seem a bit awkward in terms of generalisations, I hope the reader can follow me nevertheless and get the essence of the message I try to convey.

True debate

Secularism is radical censorship; it prevents us from sharing our deepest values to define the priorities of a common social project.

The market machine has conquered our world and taken control of our lives. It brings destruction and prevents our society from experiencing true life. The power of the market relies on a very few and simplistic illusions that we need to break first in order to find the freedom to recreate a network of relationships that are based on more human values. Therefore we need to (re)discover a (new) anthropology, i.e. a new image of what life is meant to be or at least of the priorities we may agree upon that will lead our present evolution.

The first step on the path of liberation for us Westerners and most privileged people of the planet - we constitute only the 20% of world population who consume 80% of its riches – consists first in seeing clearly what is. We need to better observe the mechanisms that drive our evolution and understand how they are the vectors of destruction, for us privileged people, in the way they allow us to extract most of

the riches of the world and live on it. This form of extraction depends on the exploitation and exhaustion of nature resources and on the exploitation and violation of so many human beings who are therefore condemned to inhuman work and life conditions.

The first step consists here in breaking the image of this model because we are prisoners of a false way of thinking that makes us the actors of general destruction for others as well as for ourselves. In human and spiritual terms, despite our superior material comfort, we suffer as much as the victims from the destruction of our relationships and of our ability to live a life guided by deep human content.

Once the modern pattern of eternal growth and material accumulation has been broken because it has been revealed to us how much it is based on corruption and hidden exploitation which we are rarely aware of, we may be free to examine what the main priorities in our lives are. What are the guiding values and energies that bring the true quality of what we wish to be able to experience in our personal or community life? What is in our eyes the meaning of life and what should be preserved in order to implement these optimal conditions? As I already said, Life remains a mystery and nobody can define what it is. On the other hand we would never be able to agree all about a same meaning. Paradoxically diversity is in this way more a wealth than an obstacle. It prevents us from coming to simplistic conclusions. It is important to see that it is more the lack of answer than the possibility of direct consensus about this mystery that will allow our attention to focus on creating conditions that are life bringing instead of us escaping into material accumulation and illusory attempts to find happiness in individualism and competition. The search is the path more than the means to bring the solution.

In order to search truly we need open conditions. All topics must be addressed without any limitation. Of course the debate must happen in an open way that nevertheless respects cultural, emotional, intellectual, metaphysical and religious diversity. But it is essential that no topic be excluded. The tragedy is today that we do exactly the contrary. In the name of respect of personal individuality we have limited the debate to material and objective topics and we call this reduction of the debate with the euphemism of secularism. Secularism says that philosophy and religion should not belong to public debate; they should remain in the private sphere where people can choose to believe what they want.

But what is the significance of our deepest beliefs if we cannot express them in public and if they do not lead our choices and behaviours, whether private or collective? What is the meaning of a public debate if it cannot express metaphysical and spiritual values? Our main choices in life are indeed based more on immaterial preferences than on pure practicalities. This does not mean that the debate has to ignore material modalities or factors that concern economic aspects of our subsistence. But if we truly intend to choose a better future it is impossible to exclude immaterial values from the debate. It means that the principle of secularism constitutes indeed a solid obstacle on the path of liberation because it reduces the debate to practical modalities only. And as we have seen, the meaning of life - in its Yin perception and understanding as illustrated by the paradigm of Mary - is the true root of our choices and priorities. A new anthropology can only take shape if it is based on human and immaterial values, i.e. far beyond mere practicalities. The principle of secularism is a form of radical censorship and it is the first obstacle to be removed from our path if we want to go beyond and address true issues that are connected with our deep human belonging.

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A new anthropology, that will offer more human and compassionate priorities for our common evolution, will take shape when all parties are involved and when diversity is well represented. The purpose of the debate is to allow minorities to find their own place and role in a diversified community. It means the aim is not to unify the crowd but on the contrary to allow diversity to become a fertilising energy. This new anthropology relies on its faculty to encompass all forms of emotional, humanist, metaphysical, spiritual expressions. The unity of the community relies on its capacity to include. Inclusion does not happen at the expense of conformism but on the contrary needs to be grounded on complementarity based on the specificity of each one member who is different from the neighbour and can therefore contribute to the general wellbeing by bringing his or her own special skills and aptitudes. One can see how much this image of a true community is different from the flattening impact of globalisation that wants all people to become consumers of the same goods and think the same way because they have access to the same media. It is about identity and recognition of each one as well as about the identity and recognition of the whole. Identity is the missing key of our modern society because it denies the right of each person to be recognised for what they are. The destruction through totalitarian systems is based precisely on the denial of personal identity and public recognition as I have shown earlier. Biodiversity is the key for the ever deeper evolution of nature. In the same way diversity and mutual recognition are the keys for social evolution. Personalisation and deepening of community links are two seemingly antagonist but indeed truly complementary and interdependent trends

True community building is the next stage of our human evolution when it goes beyond the addition of single elements and starts to express a further dimension that is based on interdependence and personalisation. The whole is much more than the addition of the

parts. It is like a body that is made of diverse organs which all play their role and are valued for this irreplaceable contribution that each one offers to the whole from which they receive a quality of life that is only possible when all contribute to the wellbeing of all. This form of interdependence allows also real care for one another. Each one cares for the whole and the whole cares for each one. This is evidently very far from what the market machine practises today! This is the breakthrough that allows new life to arise!

Diversity of identities

Colonised cultures need to recover their own identity and dismantle the image of contempt western nations have projected onto them.

The path of liberation that I just described for the western countries concerns also the southern countries because imperialism and globalisation have extended the market machine and its mentality to these countries. It means, in their new imposed setting, they are running along the same path and they need to go through the same search for meaning as the richer ones, yet from a very different point of view because this extension of our modern market relationships has overridden very different traditional cultures that pre-existed the time of conquest.

The first stage on this path consists too in seeing what is, i.e. in observing the mechanisms and how they destroy the true identity of these southern cultures. As I described them, colonialism and imperialism have not only imposed their own power and control on the exploitation of resources (natural and human), they have also de-structured the existing societies and have dismantled their ability to function as independent and more or less self-sufficient entities. In imposing their own methods and forms of power, the western

invaders have impacted on the existing indigenous social structures and made them “irrelevant” or at least unable to function as they did traditionally. In other words they broke the existing social fabric.

They introduced also new habits that were the privileges of the conquering classes and made these patterns attractive for the local elite that aspired to keep their privileged position and was ready to collaborate with the invaders. Imperialism and globalisation have extended considerably the possibilities of local markets but they have inundated them with modern goods that were produced elsewhere. These new products generated new habits, new fashions and new trends that were frequently in contradiction with the traditional customs, most often even in negation of the deepest beliefs, at least in deep conflict with the usual patterns of sustainability. Natural resources are exploited without restraint and in denial of the traditional customs of respect of nature.

On top of this direct impact that destroyed the social traditional network and the established patterns of behaviours, beliefs and customs, the image of these cultures has been deeply modified, in the name of the pretended superiority of the conquering power which was meant to civilise these poor countries. It was only the discourse of the invaders talking about the superiority of the invaders, it means only self-talk. Yet the tragedy of this discourse becomes very effective when it impacts on the general image the colonised people finally adopt of themselves. Racism has indeed the insidious and pernicious power to destabilise the people it describes in negatives terms. The domination of the racist discourse by Westerners, accompanied by the effective economic, military and political dominance of the same invaders, seems to prove the truth of this fallacious talk and of this contempt of the colonised culture which the colonised people soon adopt also for themselves. The dysfunction of

traditional societies under the impact of the de-structuration enforced by the conquest seems to add still more arguments to prove the pretended superiority of the invaders.

The second step on the path of liberation for these dominated cultures would then consist - after having perceived the devastation that the western invasion had generated – in liberating oneself from the domination of this negative image of oneself, i.e. in recreating a positive image of one's culture and in reconstituting a positive model that would be rooted more or less directly in the traditional origins. This re-conquest does not mean of course a return to the original patterns or a return to pure tradition. As no return to the past is ever possible, it is evidently a recreation of a “new” indigenous culture that has evolved through the time of domination by a foreign power and has become capable to integrate the new influences in a positive way. This is a radical transformation of the image of oneself that becomes positive and assertive.

After the first step of identification of the imposed patterns and the second step of liberation from this domination comes the third step. Once the imported model has been rejected, there is room for rebuilding a new anthropology based on traditional roots. It does not mean that every aspect of tradition is reintroduced. It means that the new pattern of development will be rebuilt onto the traditional bases because these are the only possible original roots of the local people. The local language for instance represents an extremely precious heritage because it summarises the whole traditional perception of the meaning of life and it expresses the local mentality. As far as possible – because many of them have sadly already completely disappeared - Aboriginal languages for instance should be reintroduced in Australia or Amerindian languages in North America. It would reveal unknown qualities of indigenous anthropology and restore confidence in the

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original culture and self-confidence of the indigenous people. The local music is also the expression of the indigenous soul and the vibration of the people. Architecture defines the relationship with the environment, the climate, the materials and the different know-hows as well as how people relate with one another in space. Cooking is also the art of coming together and sharing what nourishes the body and the spirit.

This third step of rediscovery of one's own culture needs to recombine the original components, after readapting them, with the new inherited ones from the more recent time. This step consists in rebuilding the traditional model on the original roots, but this reconstruction is conscious and can be selective. Everything is possible. It will first be able to discard all forms of traditional customs that are no more adapted to present conditions. It will also dare to combine new imported aspects of modernity with traditional original aspects if these new elements are not introduced because they are fashionable, prestigious or attractive but only if they are integrated in ways that offer more potential and answer better the needs and priorities which are recognised as fundamental. In general the language of the ex-conqueror (English, French, Spanish, etc.) becomes often a good means of communication that allows overcoming the barriers imposed by the high number of different local traditional languages. But this imported language remains nevertheless an artificial tool because it is void of the indigenous spirit and loaded with foreign perceptions.

This reinventing process of a positive identity needs to be rooted in one's own origin but it knows also how to create new treasures that are not reflecting any more a servile imitation of the dominating model. This process is evidently subtle and very complex because it has to be impregnated of true discernment between what is fashion

and what is authentic. It relies on the same search for a new anthropology, but in a very different way from the one to be adopted by our western nations as I described it before, because the urgency is not only about discovering or searching for the meaning of life, but it is also to go back to one's roots of one's own tradition and try to see clearly which parts of this original heritage have remained authentic. It is the opportunity to forge a new identity, that is not new by fashion but new in the way it becomes a discovery of oneself and of one's own community identity. I won't describe this process in more detail because it is a topic in itself that has been treated by much more competent people and it cannot be defined in a few sentences. In summary one can say that all this long explanation can be summarised in one sentence: we need all of us to rediscover who we are and what life is about.

The image of the other

We tend to describe the "Other" in ways that justify our fears and intentions, and explain our difficult relationship with him/her.

It is important to emphasise here how much the dominating image of the colonised culture, as the invaders have drawn it, is very pernicious because it relies on pretended scientific expertise. Colonists and imperialists have always invaded southern nations in using their own scientific knowledge of these cultures. But, here again, it is only one party talking about the way it sees the other party. All presented data are adapted to what the invader intends to demonstrate and the special aspect he wants to emphasise. The image painted of the southern cultures only illustrates the perception of the Westerner. It is only a one-sided discourse that creates a fiction that suits the invader. The indigenous is described in pejorative terms as

exotic, as not reliable, as lazy, as stupid, etc. Stories are told that seem to justify these negative descriptions.

Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* shows very well how Orientalists are self-declared scientists who create a field of research that they call Orientalism which has the mission of describing who the colonised people are. This is a vicious circle that has as principal aim to justify what is globally intended, i.e. the conquest of the invaded nations. Edward Said tells for instance how Napoleon invaded Egypt and created an Institute of Egyptian culture in order to study the conquered nation and to describe it. All that seems very fine and intelligent until it becomes noticeable how much the discourse is purely unilateral. The invader talks about the indigenous in describing how the former sees the latter. The study has not as purpose to discover the truth about the real nature of the conquered culture but to create a fiction that serves the interests of the dominating nation, in the service of the dominating process. Such a study has obviously nothing scientific. It is pure discourse.

To be of any scientific credibility, it should involve indigenous sources in a complete and objective way and not only a few extracts of documents that have been selected because they could serve a purpose. It should give the opportunity to indigenous people to express themselves and to describe who they are. Of course such a process would immediately go against the interests of the conquering power. And one sees easily how not only the dominating discourse creates a fiction but also how it prevents the indigenous people from presenting their own version. The colonial discourse not only imposes a fiction but it represses the true image of the indigenous culture and prevents its expression. It becomes a tool of domination. More than that, it becomes a destructive power that shapes a false

identity and creates the negative self-image it has earlier been talked about.

Our present image of Islam is the pure illustration of the trend Edward Said demonstrates. The description of the colonised culture by the colonist attempts only to regulate the relationship between the invader and the invaded. We do exactly the same with Islam today. From long ago, Europe has been in conflict with the Islamic nations and with the Ottoman Empire because they were both competing for the control of the same geographical space, the Mediterranean Sea. It is not for cultural or religious reasons but for economic and political rivalries that they were opposed, it means becoming enemies. When western armies (US and UK principally) invade Afghanistan and Iraq and create destruction on a large scale, indigenous people mobilise themselves and resist the invasion, i.e. do anything they can that anybody would do in similar situation. As the confrontation cannot be direct because of the evident disproportion of the means at disposition, they use the means resistance has always used: explosives that aim at destroying important assets or creating panic or destabilising the adversary. Instead of being called resisting forces they are named insurgents by the invaders because they are considered as disrupting the imposed order. They are described as a menace for the security of the invading forces. These courageous people are treated as terrorists which they are by necessity and not by vocation, i.e. by conditions the invader has imposed onto them. When these resisting forces invoke their own attachment to Islamic values (by opposition to western values that try to justify the invasion), they are considered as Islamists and Islam is directly perceived in consequence as a violent source of threatening actions against all western countries.

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This short description does not mean that any resistance to western influence is inspired by noble reasons of opposing invasion. No, evidently such conflicts are the opportunity for many criminals to act in a very violent way that respect no life and no principle. And, on top of this, a falsified description of the “enemy” can only foster violent reactions which will express themselves in a form of radical Islamism which precisely adopts the same profile as it has been described earlier as a fiction. This is the western talk how the West sees the East (Islam), in a vicious circles that only describes the fiction it wants to shape in order to justify what it does to these people. Even the terms “West” and “East” are not clearly defined and leave a lot of space for false interpretations. These two words mean indeed that there is a sort of limit between two worlds that define “Us” on one hand and the “Others” on the other hand between which there seems to be no compatibility. On top of that it creates a huge agglomerate of all Islamic people as if Islam and all the Muslims would form a homogenous body of identical people. That is of course a pure absurdity!

Nevertheless the fiction we have created of the “enemy” guides the future action of our governments and generates more invasions or more domination or at least more negative discourse. These new actions provoke evidently more aggression in response which is indeed rather self-defence. And this opportunity to aggress western interests becomes also the pretext for violent movements and extremists of all kinds to extend a war that considers no limits and no restraints. The vicious circle reinforces itself.

There is only one way out of this infernal cycle. This is the true and direct personal exchange with the one whom we perceive as the other. Direct talk, exchange and understanding will generate a completely different image because it will be lively, based on what

the other is and especially shaped by the expression of what this other, in his own diversity, wants to express. It will show that Islam is not at all a homogenous body. Islam is highly diversified in its beliefs and practices and the level of maturity of each believer is different and makes him, or her, special, as it is the case in our own culture. Christianity could indeed never be described in such a preconceived way as we do with Islam, unless one intends to kill it, which is precisely what we do with Islam! Fanaticism exists in all religions.

Any discourse of the invaders about the indigenous people is out of question. Indigenous people have to shape their own discourse. Such a principle, if it is truly practised, goes evidently against any form of invasion. It is without doubt its first principal quality, but it does still much more: it allows diversity to find forms of expressions and to be recognised. It helps us to learn about the other, how he truly is and how to cope with diversity and how to handle this inestimable wealth in a positive and creative way. In doing so the southern path of liberation joins the western path, because we are indeed all very similar as human beings having to find our mysterious way through life.

Violence and decolonisation

Violence (not necessarily physical) has to be understood (not justified) as a means to become free of imposed identity projections.

Colonialism, imperialism and globalisation have stripped so many cultures and nations and people of their rights and identity. This is a very violent and destructive attack of these entities and of all persons. And violence calls for violence. It means that the path of liberation is called to be violent if the oppressed just answers the call for their

liberation and their justification. And the cycle never finishes because this responsive violence calls for more violence as well.

Yet the path of liberation - even if it intends to be non-violent, as Gandhi has shown it is possible – remains impregnated by an inbuilt violence in a similar way as birth is violent too. This is not a violence aimed at the enemy, but it is a deep process of transformation that cannot prevent from breaking many limits and resistances.

We need urgently, as westerners, to understand how much we have, through long centuries, created the present situation that explodes now in our face, whether in the colonies or in the “mother” country (boomerang effect). We exacerbate it even more nowadays in the poor suburbs of our western cities when we deny new generations of young immigrants any possibility to identify with their original culture and religion, despite the fact they came recently from dominated countries and still identify strongly with their culture of origin. We expect from them that they adapt totally to the western way of life, abandon their own identity, imitate us fully - as if this were for them the only possible salvation - and adopt our own values. If they don't, we feel threatened. Our governments and forces of security intervene in these poor suburbs in a form of war that requires from these “insurgents” total submission and enculturation under the pretext they are considered as marginal and criminal. But this repression is evidently perceived by these young people as a terrible form of violence that denies them the simple right of being themselves. France, with its dominating principle of secularism and its indistinct wish for a French identity to be adopted by all without distinctions, generates for these young people, much more than in the UK, a feeling of being negated and aggressed.

It is urgently time that we learn to allow differences to express themselves and to be valued. When we will be more courageous to make secularism an old discarded pattern, we will be able to learn to live in a pluralistic society. Pluralism is the direct consequence of the links we have ourselves established in the past with southern countries. We have chosen freely to integrate these other cultures into our network of relationships. They are evidently now parts of this extended network and it is for us, as well as for them, a fantastic opportunity to develop to a higher level of social maturity. We cannot say “yes” to goods and capital and “no” to people. If circulation is free then it has to be for all.

This of course does not mean that doors should remain widely open. No, a control is certainly necessary to avoid excessive migrations and the negative consequences these transfers of population inevitably bring with themselves. Too much openness would create violent reactions and strong racism as we know by experience. But this new openness should nevertheless integrate our past and present responsibilities and recognise who needs assistance. In any case if we learn how to reconcile with these many other cultures, we will also create more peaceful relationships which will allow each one to be well at home. Who indeed wishes to leave their own country when everything remains peaceful and life conditions allow subsistence to be normal? Each one has their own roots in the place where they grew up.

The debate about the hijab is a good illustration of the progress in our understanding of one another that calls us. In France there is a strong tendency to forbid any sign of expression of religious belonging, especially if it is Islamic. In which right can one forbid people to express what matters most to them? Do we have truly to become all similar as clones, dressed in the Mao dress of the sixties or any

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uniform that prevents any personal expression? How can we allow other people (for instance immigrants) to do the same thing as we do (such as dressing) but in their own way, without creating conflicts? One just needs to imagine (pure folly) what would be the impact of a law that would oblige all French women to dress in the same way or wear the same suit or swimming costume and we become more aware of the huge absurdity of this way of thinking that imposes limits of formal expression. What does not suit western women cannot suit eastern women either.

All people need to be able to express who they are through the way they dress. The hijab is a bit like a hat. Some people need it to feel protected. Of course any custom can become also a means for oppression and then it has no more meaning as expression of true identity but it becomes only a mark of repression. In this case the person has to be protected by his or her social context (the wider society) against any abuse or illegitimate pressure. I am aware that this form of protection is the main argument for the interdiction of the hijab or of any religious expression through the way one dresses but it is nevertheless evident that the same rule is not applied to all people in an equal way. The interdiction aims at Islamic people before all, because of an untold fright of what is different. No French women would accept this form of intrusion in her private life. It is why it seems only “acceptable” when it is imposed to foreign people because of their difference. The rule becomes then a tool for segregation and racism that relies on fear, as pure illustration of this artificial image we create of the “other” for the purpose of justifying our dominance in the name of the control of the difference.

Pluralism will obviously have to be our future new stage of evolution because it reflects so well the heritage of our recent past. It offers the potential for a peaceful expression of diversity. When each one feels

understood they can live in peace. Wrongly we believe that in imposing the model of the mother country we will help people to integrate. This is a deep mistake; it only denies the most fundamental rights to be oneself.

At the end of this very rapid description of the path of liberation I would like to add a general remark. As it is proved by the inevitable relative apparent simplistic character of the precedent pages, the path of liberation cannot be described in a few words because it is an intensely complex process, especially in what concerns southern cultures. What I have expressed here seems probably very idealistic and naïve. It is true that there is a form of naivety in trying to propose another strategy in only a few pages but these pages nevertheless illustrate pretty well the spirit in which we have to rethink our future. This spirit should be a spirit of openness and it should express a will to integrate differences instead of repressing them. Pluralism is a long learning process and it starts with the will to go on this path. The decision is very simple in itself; only the implementation is complex. It is why, I believe, it is worth trying to describe this path as I did. In no way this description is more simplistic than the primitive premises of our present development geared mainly by economic forces. On the contrary my description attempts to integrate our most human desires and hopes and it is fundamentally creative. Idealism seems always naïve to the cynical but I believe that idealism is nothing else than a wider vision that integrates many more different factors and especially more immaterial dimensions, and reveals itself in this way to be more realistic because it adapts to a wider and deeper reality.

In conclusion of this chapter we can say that diversity and inclusiveness have to become one of the leading threads to reconstitute a more complete and mature society and to learn how to live together despite big differences and antagonisms. In order to

allow weaker recessive qualities to flourish we need to protect the inner social sphere from the most powerful pressures that are dominant. We need nothing more than a form of protection that keeps a balance between diverse influences and allows the weaker trends to come to fruition.

4) COMPLEMENTARITY AS A RETURN TO LIFE

We have seen so far how femininity and its qualities are mainly recessive and how the main stages of the evolution of mankind have allowed masculinity to dominate and to erase ever more feminine qualities from our social context. This trend is destructive of life itself and we need to find a way out of this form of monolithic domination to be able to rediscover a wider range of life experiences. In the precedent pages I have shown the dominance of masculine (Yang) values and shown how they have shaped our society and brought imbalances, mainly by lack of more recessive harmonising forces. These considerations were rather based on the antagonism of Yang and Yin forces and on the dominance of the former over the latter, more than on their complementarity. I have also described how Yang and Yin always combine with one another and how they need to develop their reciprocal complementarity in order to be fully expressed. Let's now examine how feminine and masculine trends are also indeed complementary and meant to help each other to reach full expression in a combination where each one is not antagonistic to the other but on the contrary a vector of support, as if, by coexisting, both forces would multiply each other's effects. This is what one may call the marriage of the feminine with the masculine.

The marriage of the feminine and the masculine

Perception and expression

Any form of expression needs to be rooted in awareness of the deeper meaning of life: a sacred private space that needs protection.

The myths of John the Baptist and Mary - they are here considered as myths because of their metaphoric meaning about the essence of life – show how expression and action need on one hand to be rooted in perception of what motivates and guides them and on the other hand to be reshaped by a clear understanding of what these forms of expression mean and how they can be deepened and transformed at their own root. It is indeed sterile to act without motivation or intention. It is why we need to learn ever more how to become aware of our true motivations and how to reshape these deeper motivations to make them more compatible with the real priorities of our life, rather in terms of principal values and choices than of mere practical conditions. Even when our motivations are not clearly expressed, they still remain hidden in our subconscious. They continue to lead our actions. It means that, when we are not aware of what motivates us, the deeper unconscious energy that underlies our action remains fully active although not visible and our own lack of awareness of the true nature of this energy prevents us from following a path that could be better rooted in what matters most for us or according to Truth.

Mary, as the paradigm of attentive perception and receptive awareness, shows us how much the hidden field of our personal motivations impacts onto our life. This field is hidden in two ways; firstly because it touches at least partly the domain of the unconscious that leads us in unknown ways; and secondly because the search for the deeper meaning of life takes mainly place in the most private part of our being. It is par excellence the private garden of dream, contemplation, meditation and reflection where our intuitions and insights take shape. This is very much the hidden space of our personal creativity. It is a womb where life arises and develops from the first minute intuition to the full expression that can then become more public.

It is important to see how much this space matters and how much it needs to be protected because life in the womb can only develop in its fragility when it is secure and protected from external interferences. As long as it is taking form, it needs protection. It does not mean it is cut off from external life. No, it is very much fostered by past or external influences but it needs this minimum time of protected space to take shape and come to life. The expression comes then as an expression of what has matured, protected from external glance.

This time of elaboration of our deepest intuitions and motivations is essential in the way it shapes our personal choices and expression.

We are used in our western society to rush into action because we believe that our happiness depends on what we experience in our contact with the world and on what we get from our context. But it is indeed rather the contrary: our interaction with the context in which we live will only take a harmonious shape if we have taken time, in our most inner protected hidden space, to get to a more mature awareness that will allow a clearer state of action. More than what we do, what matters depends on the spirit in which we do it. The way we look at the world creates the world in which we live.

In our search for more awareness, deeper perception (sensations) and more subtle meaning (interpretation) become two major important keys. Perception through our sensations defines how we become aware of our environment and of what happens around us; it transforms the real facts into signals that are different from the facts because they have been filtered by our senses and our mind. We know by experience that, when our environment is perceived, it has already been transformed into perceptions and our interpretation of

what we perceive will transform the original signals still further into a content that is an expression of how we see the world. In fact we make the world in which we live inasmuch as we transform the objective reality into personal interpretation that makes the world understandable, or more suitable, to us because we need to give an acceptable meaning to what happens around us. This attempt of giving a meaning is almost unavoidable because we believe that things have to make sense, even when we are forced to recognise that they may be meaningless or absurd; yet our subjective interpretation changes the world. This transformation by interpretation is indeed essential in the way we are then able to fit into our own surroundings because, as an interpretation, it gives a meaning, provides an access to the surrounding reality and redirects our behaviour.

These successive stages of perception and interpretation define our further attitude, choices and (re)actions. They are the Yin components of our personal life. They happen also in reference to a wider context of culture that can be understood as an already formed and kind of readymade interpretation that our culture proposes to us globally as the result of all cumulated past human experience that had to cope with similar events. We can in this way adopt this more or less readymade interpretation or on the contrary forge our own. The references for our own interpretation are evidently multiple and complex, hence they generate the diversity of interpretations that we adopt in our own diversity of perceptions when we dare to compare our own with the one of our neighbours and observe how they go through similar experiences as we do but yet with very different interpretations and conclusions.

We have generally tendency to under-evaluate the important role that these different stages of perception and interpretation play in our life. It is indeed this hidden deeper understanding that will shape our

Complementarity as a return to life

expression and action. The Yang (action) is here defined by the Yin (gestation) that provides its embodiment. The child, before it is born, is shaped by the womb.

It is why it is essential that we learn how to go deeper into this womb stage in order to better let mature the energies that are active. We are indeed the true actors that shape these energies. We: it means our true being in its full scope – much beyond the limitations of our ego or false self.

The private sphere of our own inner birth is the core of our being. As it has been said, it needs to be a protected space because it is the mysterious womb where our deeper being takes shape and becomes expressed in our body. It is the space where true incarnation happens. Incarnation consists in this case in much more than the body shape that is given to our invisible being; it is indeed a dynamic process that renews itself constantly and never stops until we die. This is the constant transformation of our life energy into consciousness and expression.

This private space is beyond anything we can grasp. It is why it is highly sacred and needs to be protected because it is the source of everything we are. Beyond our personal intuitions and will and awareness of what we want to be or do, there is the womb where life itself gives shape to our person. This private space is beyond our will and control. It is a mysterious core where the source of our person is flowing. This is where the true self is leading us. It means it is far deeper than the realm of all forms of expression. The ego is only the outer shell that has to harden in order to protect this fragile true self which is our own essence. The ego is not our deeper being. It is not even the expression of it but only the hardened shell of protection of

life in this space where the true self becomes intimate and personal before it is exteriorised.

The source of life is the energy of our constant transformation. It is the original energy that shapes our being in this deeper inner protected sphere. Who are we? How can we know ourselves? Although we cannot escape our own presence and intimacy, we never can grasp the root of our being. The true self is the true essence of who we are before we even were born. The true self is the force of transformation that does not define us as a constant being but on the contrary as a flow that constantly changes. Yet despite this permanent transformation there is a core of being, there is a person who is. And this person takes different shapes and expresses itself in different ways. The bubbling of this constant transformation is not under our control and it is why the true self can arise in this deeper private space, precisely because we cannot control the way it arises but only open this space where it takes shape.

What we have soon learned to control, already as a little child, is how our true self comes to external expression after it arises in this deeper protected space. Our natural tendency is to prevent it from flowing naturally. We generally do not accept it to lead us freely because we are afraid of this powerful energy of life that could escape our control. In consequence we do incredible efforts to control it and to reshape it in more socially suitable forms that would serve our interests and our formal representations of how people should behave in order to be powerful, prestigious and to impress our surroundings. Tibetan Buddhist teaching describes eight main social worries that lead us on the path of illusion: the hope for pleasure and the fear for displeasure or suffering, the hope for gain and the fear for loss, the hope for good reputation and the fear for disgrace, the hope for praise and the fear for blame. In consequence of these illusory attractions

we build a false self that is a form of mastered formulation of what we could be in order to fit into the world and be successful in the way we imagine we have to, if we want to achieve what we believe is happiness. Instead of letting our life energy be the master of our life, we prefer to reduce its power to the field we can control and we attempt to imprison this powerful energy into the limitations of our poor representations.

Yet the potential remains fully and we remain constantly able to learn how to refrain our false self from controlling our true deeper nature. This is a long process of self-transformation. First we have to learn how to be free from fitting into the social construct. It does not mean that we do the contrary of what is expected from us. It means “only” that we remain focussed on what this powerful energy teaches us about the true essence of life and that we do what is possible to conform to this deeper energy. We learn to discern how our false self is a false expression of our true nature and we learn to be more open to the deeper expression that arises in us.

This learning process is rooted in consciousness. First there is the mindfulness in observing what happens in us and why it does. Then, at a further stage, there is the deeper recognition of the true essence of life. Of course we never can grasp what it is truly but we can develop a finer faculty to better respond to its call. This is probably how we learn to make a distinction between our true and our false selves. Indeed the false self is a very tricky form of disguise and it is not easy to identify it, especially when it hides under good appearances and tries to let us believe it is our true nature.

These few remarks show better why the private space needs to be protected. It is indeed a field where a lot happens and what happens there is probably the most essential part of our own becoming.

Nurturing and structuring

Rooted in the ground of being the seed needs to be first nurtured; it then needs a supporting structure, between emptiness and form.

Our being is like a garden. It is of course a very common metaphor that tells us how we have to feed the soil. Gardening is mainly the art to prepare a soil that is as rich and diverse as possible, nevertheless adapted to the plants we want to grow in it, with the right ingredients and the right pH which vary from one plant to the next. Before it starts to grow, we need to protect it from snails and birds and other greedy teeth. Then it will probably need a structure to support it. Tomatoes plants can grow without a stake but the tomatoes will get more sunlight if they can hang on the strength of the stake.

This is a simple metaphor that tells us how our children and our own child in us need to be fed properly and to be offered a structure that supports but does not enclose. A skeleton supports the body and allows it to develop without restraining its development while a shell protects much better but prevents to extend beyond the limits defined by the shell itself. Structure is meant to provide support without restricting the evolution of the fundamental potentials of the being it supports.

Good feeding conditions imply a wide education that not only informs about many aspects of life but also teaches how to remain free of accepting the proposed interpretations of the facts it has described, or not. This exercise becomes still more important when one becomes aware how much the understanding of our outer world is very much a social construct. Knowledge, although it is based on observation and experience, creates a man-made picture of our reality

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that is very defined and controlled by our intellectual faculties and also by our will to remain in control of what we observe. Science, although it is precise, has built an image of our world that is much deprived of any sacred dimension. It is evidently not its task but its attitude towards the other dimensions of our reality is often dominant and exclusive, and it adopts a contemptuous attitude towards other approaches. It pretends to represent the only possible access to knowledge. Allied with technology it has become a dominant force of our perception of the universe. Of course it remains clear that science and spirituality meet on a higher level but they are often presented as antagonistic movements of introspection, especially when science is challenged by metaphysical or spiritual perceptions. This is precisely when one notices how science, despite its pretend to be objective, is also nevertheless, beyond its powerful revelation of many fundamental aspects of reality, a powerful epistemological construct. It has certainly examined our surroundings with extreme precision but probably because of this too strong focus on details, it has lost the wider picture and the awareness of its restricted approach. A broader investigation of reality - based on the understanding that it is a mystery that surpasses any possible representation - may allow us restoring or at least reintroducing a wider frame of wonder as the major dimension of the picture, which we are aware never to master.

The feeding approach of the gardener is then a constant debate about truth that never stops escaping us. Food in this wider sense is only the basic material that has to be examined or still discovered. Food in this meaning may suggest also some insights how to handle the material but it never provides any ready-made answer.

It is where the structure plays a major role because it has to offer this support that helps the growth without restricting the evolution. It supports the being in order to help it discover life without proposing

or restricting the freedom of movement. The structure stimulates the need to question everything; it creates the different connections that allow the being to relate to others or to establish further links between different aspects of life or topics. Life is a wide network of relationships that never stops evolving and changing, establishing ever new relations while others died out.

When education, in a wider sense, has to offer good food and structure, it means that it has also to propose many possible interpretations. It does not mean that the disciple should accept them as such. No, on the contrary, they should be received as many challenges to question further their validity. It is very difficult to forge one own opinion in front of a blank paper but a text will provoke reactions of adequacy or rejection which are very rich and encourages the disciple to find his/her own way. It is why, I believe, it is wrong to forbid the teaching of religion at school. It is a way to deprive the disciples from the possibility to forge their mind and to discover new ways of beings. Only a clear exposure to the diversity of possible interpretations of the world, whether scientific, poetic, humanistic, metaphysical or spiritual, is able to help people, especially if they are young, to find their own way. Of course a sound exposure to these different traditions or interpretations should not be fundamentalist in order to respect the freedom of mind that each one may have the privilege to practise.

In this simplified description we may recognise the nurturing quality of Yin and the structuring aptitude of Yang. They combine and try to offer the necessary conditions without restricting. This movement of giving life is not an effort for control but a pure gift of free responsibility. Freedom is here of course not just the ability to choose what is convenient and comfortable; it is the ability to move without restrictions in a space that allows conforming to truth. True freedom

is the free acceptance of the constraints imposed by truth. Freedom is the path (the form), truth is the content.

On this search nurturing and structuring play together very complementary roles that seem antagonistic but yet combine in infinite ways to allow balance (the third term) to be found, although, as it is dynamic, this balance never stops escaping and coming back under another form of dialogue of these antagonistic yet complementary forces. We can see how this dialogue develops between the two poles of form and emptiness.

Emptiness and form

Form reveals and also hides the deep meaning of Emptiness, which reveals the content of form that has to dissolve. Both are essential.

This is evidently a very delicate topic and I do not pretend to be able to add anything to what has already been said and written on this theme. This is indeed the core of Buddhist teaching. Yet I will try to relate the teaching to what I have already described of the Yin-Yang relationships.

I believe we live in a space between three worlds.

- Firstly there is the wider world of the Universe with its laws of harmony and love that foster life. This is a world of abundance and generosity that generates a constant flow of energy and resources which are able to feed any need we may have, each of us, and the whole humanity as well the many other species that form part of this wide universe in the same way as we do as mankind. This world is the background, the frame, the hull, the true content of our experience. It is the source of our true essence,

the source of our being. Without it we would not be. It cannot be seen although it is the core of everything. It is beyond form but it nevertheless rules all aspects of life. It is the source of everything. Without it nothing would exist. But without form it would not be perceptible.

- Secondly there is the world of our surroundings, of nature, of the Earth on which we live because we are incarnated beings. As we have bodies and live in space and time, we have ceaselessly to cope with forms: forms of our own body and presence, forms of our surroundings and forms we give to what we create, i.e. our ways of living as well as what we dare to transform in our environment, whether material or social. The world in which we live is the form that reveals the true content of the source of our being, of our true essence. These outer appearances, although they are not the essence, make it visible.
- Thirdly there is the world we construct with our mind. We never stop trying to understand and to interpret what happens in front of us, in this visible world in which we live. Because we believe that what we observe and what we understand of the visible world is a true description of its authentic nature, we never stop projecting our own understanding and wishes onto the outer world. The real world disappears because the first world (our source) is not visible and the second world (the visible aspect of the first) gets covered by our own projections. These projections replace the real world and we live in a fiction that we have created. Because the true expression of the first world is hidden, we lose track of reality and we live in an illusionary world we have created ourselves. On top of this we try to transform the surrounding world to make it more compatible with our wishes. The distortion is then double, because of our projection and because of our transformative influence. The reality of injustice of our social

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organisation and the natural collapse of the environment are signs of this double distortion.

The relationships between these three worlds are complex although indeed they form only one and unique world, but our mind never stops transforming the world of our surroundings because we feel the need to interpret it, to judge it, to impose our will and to adapt it to what we believe it should be. In other words it means that we are not happy to live in a world of harmony. We are afraid of life and we need to protect ourselves from life. We interpret therefore what we see; we project what we want; we think intensively about what we perceive and remain confronted to the deep mystery that it reveals. It is important to see that, although we try to transform our surroundings, this world of appearances is basically expressing the true nature of the invisible world (the wider universe with its laws of harmony as origin of our essence) but we never cease intervening in it and we lose therefore the wider picture. Although we have no experience of what the true wider universe is, we start very early in childhood to build our own image of what the world is and what it should be, i.e. how it should be transformed and adapted in order to serve our needs and desires.

It starts with the twisted idea I have of who I am which will lead me on the path of suffering, in conflict with the world: As soon as I develop an awareness of who I believe to be, I identify myself with my body-mind-memory, with this temporary form of my own physical envelop that seems to content all I am and define also the strict limit of what I am not. And soon after, based on this false assumption, I make myself distinct from all others. I believe to understand that they are opposed energies to mine, that what is mine is not theirs and reciprocally. I decide very soon also how they should behave, how they should serve my interests or at least not go against

them. I decide although I have no control over these matters. The fact others do not behave as I wish them to is of course the source of an unlimited frustration for me. Ownership, exchanges, skills, items, as well as all other similar kinds of characteristics that could make me different from others, become the many fields of negotiation for my power of control and domination to extend to the limits of my own ambition. Because I believe that we live in antagonistic (almost inimical) relationships, I need to defend my interests and increase my power in order to protect myself and allow myself thriving when I can be the stronger. This is evidently the path of illusion and suffering.

This need for power leads to all forms of domination we know: violence at home, fear of the others, inner insecurity, compensation in false forms of escape (addictions, habits or restrictions), exploitation, rejection, marginalisation, segregation, hate, war, etc.. But the source of this trend for domination is our projection of our mind onto the surroundings i.e. this third world we have constructed in our imaginary mind. We never stop creating a world of fiction that does not fit with the real world because we want to ignore the hidden face of it, the invisible harmony that does not materialise in the way we would like it to. Because of this artificial picture of the world we have created and continue to create ceaselessly in our mind and phantasy, we stand in relationship with the world of our incarnation (the second world that reveals to us the true nature of the first) in a deep conflict that prevents us from seeing how this first world is in fact perfectly fitting our needs. The thought creates the twist and the false image we create in this way hides the true picture. The more we build our world at our convenience, the more we imprison ourselves into an illusory world that becomes more and more frightening. And the more we are frightened, the more we try to escape from this cruel

world. Then, worse than ever, we transform the world to adapt it to our false picture. In one word we mess it up.

The only way out of this infernal spiral is to come back to ourselves in our interior protected space and to reconsider the madness of our experience. In the silent of our inner peace we have many possibilities to see the cracks of this outer image and to let the light come in, as says the poet (Leonard Cohen). In our inner silence we can afford to delve into this wider Reality (the first world) that is all encompassing and loving. On one hand we perceive this inner truth of peace and on the other hand we have forged this mad fiction. It is our choice to decide which one we want to believe and which one we want to build our life onto, in the intermediary world of appearances, before it is falsified by our projections.

The choice between these two forms of understanding (the one that returns to the source and the one that relies on our projections) seems first to be impossible by lack of trustful signs of what is the truth. Yet a radically critical observation of each one of these two images will soon dissolve the one which is a fiction and reinforce the one which is real, especially when the second world can be considered without passion and attachment and seen as the very temporal and ever changing expression of what it is. Observation is a powerful tool when it is used with detachment and the committed will to see the truth and only the truth and at any price. Forms of our outer world (the second world of our incarnation) reveal to us the true reality that hides behind forms and appearances. They show on one hand the Reality that rules the universe and on the other hand the madness of our human construct and how far these two worlds seem opposed although they are one. The split between both is nothing else than this mad construct we have elaborated through the centuries by believing the many crazy thoughts that arise in our mind. When we observe the

essence of Reality as we can get glimpses of it, we understand that the whole picture we have shaped is the true cause of our suffering and of the way we mistreat the world and all sentient beings, whether human or animal or plants or rocks.

Our obsessions with appearances and forms create our problem, and therefore our suffering. We have difficulty to accept that Emptiness is the true form of what we perceive; it means that true reality remains always behind the forms that reveal it. The forms are only very rapid and temporary glimpses of what lays behind. Forms make visible but they also hide the true content because they are only partial and fugitive. When I see a butterfly, I am amazed at its grace, but when I catch it, I squash it and destroy it and reality has vanished. We have truly to learn how to perceive and how to let go immediately of what we have understood, because in our effort to understand and to get hold of our understanding and to make it a true expression of real knowledge, we flatten (squash) the mystery and deprive ourselves form true perception. The play between form and emptiness is very subtle and dynamic. It cannot be grasped, only experienced as a flitting instant of what true life is. The ungraspable and unfathomable aspects of reality reveal to us its liveliness and ever unstoppable evolution and dynamic that never can be seen in no-motion.

When we accept that our material reality only allows short glimpses and when we understand that we can trust Reality because it is harmonious and based on love, we can let go of our fears of accept our powerlessness in a move that provides us with everything we need. Reality is a mystery and this mystery is graciousness, as uses to say Zen teacher AMA Samy. It means that Reality cannot be grasped but, despite that, Graciousness is the living connection we may enter in relationship with the personal aspect of the Universe: Purusha for the Hindus, Emptiness for the Buddhists, Yahweh for the Jews,

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Christ for the Christians, Al-Haq for the Muslims, or just the Ground of Being for whoever accepts that our world is guided by a personal force of love and an intension to lead it to accomplishment, beyond its mere material appearances. This personal expression of the Ground of Being reveals to us that our connection with the deeper Reality is not an abstract quest of the Absolute but on the contrary a deep personal experience of a quality that touches us in the deepest part of our being. Love and harmony and peace are the words used to describe it but it remains beyond words, because also we can only catch short glimpses of it, ever flitting perception that never can be stopped. In this antagonistic yet complementary relationships between form and emptiness, Yin and Yang are evidently the leading energies that open us to the mystery while recognising yet all forms of expression, even if they are partial, which they are inevitably.

When we are rooted in this dialogue between form and emptiness – is it possible that we may ever be truly and definitely rooted? – the struggle for balance does not stop. Our whole life as incarnated beings seems based on the constant choice or invention of the true forms that fit the content and make it visible. Although we are spiritual beings we cannot escape the material and formal aspects of our incarnation and we need therefore to find forms of expression for each of our acts in order to express or reveal the true essence of who we are in the depth of ourselves. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form, as says the Heart Sutra. Here again the mystery challenges us and opens the door to true life and true love.

Innocence and knowledge

Our western society has taught us to believe in knowledge. Despite its creativity knowledge dissolves innocence. Both are necessary.

We can observe in the preceding description how our relationship with our surroundings (natural or social) is falsified by what we believe we perceive it is intrinsically. As my simplified description above of our historical evolution has shown, our perception of the world has been ever more shaped by our rational mind. The impact of science and technology is constantly increasing and becomes the leading force in our world, with the support of market that does nothing else than codify our relationships in these material terms. We know more and more and we are proud of this evolution. Certainly our scientific and material knowledge of our surroundings has drastically increased in the last centuries. Health and education have greatly improved thanks to these new ways of better understanding the forces at play and interacting with the tools that may solve many problems of our everyday life. On the other hand spiritual wisdom and philosophical knowledge have developed powerfully and provide many partial answers or at least indicate directions in which to go if we want to respond to our present dilemma about the future.

Yet it is essential to see that a too clear picture of the wider image of our condition can be as reducing as it can be helpful. In discovering a scientific picture of our world (our interpretation of the incarnated side), we draw also a picture of what it is. Our mind redesigns the world in an attempt to make it understandable. This effort is certainly very helpful, yet only under the restrictive condition that it does not reduce reality (Reality) to our understanding and to the picture itself. A picture is a representation of the world. And we saw before how the picture (the construct) we create of the world is the cause of our suffering. This means that the picture we elaborate of the world, inasmuch as it helps us to understand, will also reduce our perception of the reality itself and imprison us therefore in its narrow view.

Science reveals, but science hides also what it does not perceive. This is a fundamental aspect of science - and of our many forms of knowledge in general - which is too often neglected and even more or less consciously dissimulated in order not to reveal the weaknesses of the system. Yet the weaknesses are precisely its strength to make it able to develop further into more mystery because, despite of all discoveries, the mystery remains as thick as it ever has been. Doubts are a powerful tool to help us to progress on our path of inquiry. Only doubt and curiosity can help us to ask the true questions. I will come back to this statement later because it is fundamental in the search for truth.

Knowledge is the consolidation of what mankind has observed and learned about the graspable material world in which we live and its less visible aspects. It includes in this way the cumulated experience of mankind on all topics related with life or any interaction with the environment, from the most graspable to the most abstract and subtle it reaches even beyond understanding. This knowledge is, in our western civilisation, mainly rational and is essentially based on what can be measured and on the principle that any experience can be described in precise terms and can be repeated when the necessary conditions are recreated.

The main characteristic of knowledge is probably to be limited to what it knows. The unknown aspects are usually ignored or are subjects to further research or hypothesis. It means we believe that knowledge is fully contained because it cannot be viewed as the minuscule part that escapes the night of mystery; it does not accept to be, in negative, perceived as the shadow aspect of mystery, i.e. as the part of mystery that is no more a mystery, although it remains indeed a mystery too, inasmuch as the relation of this partial knowledge with

the mystery remains a total mystery and cannot therefore be defined as a whole.

Ignorance is in this way a powerful tool for discovering what is still unknown. Ignorance is not at all the negation of knowledge; it is its source because it is the motivation for opening to the unknown. To be able to recognise to ignorance this fundamental importance of what is able to reveal the deeper truth, one needs to develop a personal and intimate relationships with innocence. Innocence is the state of mind and of being which we adopt when we rely more on the flow of life than on our own power to control our destiny. Innocence is lived ignorance as sincere opening to what is and to what has to come. Children practice innocence in their everyday life because they are not aware of what is coming and take it as it is. They do not plan and do not act with a purpose. When they do, it means that they have reached the age where they are slowly losing their ability to live in innocence.

Once innocence is lost it seems impossible to us to go back to this state of bliss where experience of the world reveals a wider and deeper picture that is not corrupted by what we believe we know of it. How can we be able to go back to innocence as the true form of ignorance that opens us to the deep mystery? Zen has traditionally tried to teach the path of wisdom where one gets free of our way to understand the world and life through concepts and where we are open to another more direct experience of Reality.

We saw earlier, about the myths of the Garden of Eden, how the Tree of Life represents the innocent approach of Life as a Source that provides us with everything. There is only Life and nothing else and our vocation is to let go of everything and let Life take hold of us. On the contrary there is the Tree of Knowledge that represents the way

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we divide every aspect of reality into two opposite forces. We fall into dualism and learn to distinguish good and evil, the world and us, body and mind, God and his creation, suffering and happiness, etc. Instead of following the flow we resist it and try to grasp what we want and reject what we do not want. Life becomes a huge struggle against reality to make it correspond to our own wishes, as if we could decide what reality should be.

In this struggle between a form of dualistic knowledge and the stream of life grounded in innocence (the Original Light) the former appears as true ignorance because it is trapped in dichotomist rational thinking while the latter is an expression of the fullness of what Zen calls Emptiness or what we may call also the Ground of Being. It means that we have to choose between, on one hand, a struggle of our rational mind against our broader experience of the world and, on the other hand, an attempt to make us free of narrow concepts in order to return to the Source as an experience beyond words and representations.

It seems that knowledge and innocence are antagonistic. They are probably opposed in the way the former is full while the latter is empty; but they are also certainly complementary. Indeed they need each other because they can progress only when they combine. Knowledge has too much the power to freeze what has been grasped and therefore it needs innocence to free it from its own corset. On the other hand innocence needs probably knowledge as a help to mature in learning how to be confronted by experience and by what it brings as new perception and understanding. Yet it has to remain powerful and not to be squashed by the new acquired formulation of truth that seems to ensue out of experience. In other words one could say that knowledge concerns rather the practicalities of our daily life while innocence is the ladder to higher truth.

Innocence is deeply Yin while knowledge is Yang. In their dialog they give shape to the marriage of masculinity and femininity. The fruit of this union is an indistinctly formed way of living that does not get trapped into rigidified knowledge but continues flowing into the never ceasing development and transformation of what is. Life is a movement that never stops and that we cannot freeze. It is perpetual transformation; on the material and visible level it translates itself in a never ending array of anecdotal forms that flow from one into another. Thanks to innocence life may let go what has been and may remain open to what comes. Innocence is a combination of detachment and perfect trust.

Focus and attention

As we have learned mainly to solve single problems our mind focusses on details and loses its ability for attention to the whole.

It is interesting to distinguish two forms of awareness: focus and attention are two different qualities of concentration.

First it is important to emphasise that any ability to concentrate and not be distracted is a positive progress in comparison with the general slackness of attention in our culture. Small children at school are no more capable to concentrate more than a few minutes. They are used to be bombarded by a huge flow of impressions that social media throw on them. They are accustomed to be overstimulated and cannot cope with the density of information their senses get. The responsibility is not the one of the children but the one of adults who expose them to such a dense bombardment.

The learning process for a deeper attention is a long path. Many adults do not even practice attention nor focus.

Focus is a form of very concentrated attention. It tends to exclude all other aspects of life in order to concentrate on one single object. It is evidently a privilege to be able to focus on a single object and not to be distracted by external influences. Yet it is important to see that this way of focussing is a typical product of our culture. This is a natural tendency of the mind to be caught by problems and to come back again and again to the current problems of our daily life. Minute problems are like peanuts for our monkey mind! It means that our mind has the tendency to focus on small objects and enjoys chewing problems. It is like an obsession and even when the problem cannot be solved or has already been solved, the mind returns nevertheless to it and chews it again in a vicious circle. Small problems provide food for the mind but food that does not nourish it; it only keeps it busy.

It is why attention, which is the other form of concentration to be distinguished from focus, constitutes the other necessary alternative how the mind may make us become aware. In opposition to focus, attention is much broader. While focus is exclusive because it can only concentrate on one object at the time, attention is all-embracing. It is wide open to the whole context. It tries to have the broadest perception it may have. In this way it is an excellent antidote to the tendency of the mind to focus on small problems in an exclusive way. Attention is not focussed. It involves all the senses and the mind in a form of awareness of everything that is. It is probably narrowly linked with consciousness because it relates every part to the wider whole and perceives it as a unified totality.

Focus is a Yang aptitude while attention in its broadness is a Yin attitude. They evidently combine and are complementary. We

certainly need both in our daily life; focus is rather useful for the practicalities of life while attention brings the wider picture of the meaning which gives sense to the nitty-gritty.

Focus relies on will; attention doesn't. Attention concentrates on truth which is global. This kind of search cannot be the path of wilfulness. It needs first to surrender to grace and to be humble because truth is not an item one can grab. It is a revelation, it is a gift. Therefore it is meaningless to apply will to broader attention. Attention is truly nourished by desire – which is not the small desire for little pleasures but the fundamental thirst for a partial discovery of the mystery of life - or rather by the burning passion to have part in the revelation, whatever small or great it may be. Attention is the fruit of commitment to the path of discovery. It is not a conquest but a form of supplication.

Simone Weil writes: “We liberate energy in ourselves, but it constantly reattaches itself. How are we to liberate it entirely? We have to desire that it should be done in us — to desire it truly — simply to desire it, not to try to accomplish it. For every attempt in that direction is vain and has to be dearly paid for. In such a work all that I call ‘I’ has to be passive. Attention alone — that attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears — is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call ‘I’ of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived. The capacity to drive a thought away once and for all is the gateway to eternity. The infinite in an instant.”

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A new strategy

When we learn to combine what we always considered as extreme and antagonistic forces, we reach a new level of maturity that opens to the world as it is.

The systematic questioning of our thoughts

Our mind never stops giving birth to new thoughts or bites of knowledge. We need to question and free ourselves from these thoughts.

Our western culture values highly the power of our intellects and the capacity of our minds to produce thoughts. We have tendency to trust these thoughts because we believe that they are the products of experience and the fruit of an authentic observation of reality. Yet they are only thoughts our brain produces ceaselessly without taking care of checking their validity. If I hear a rooster crow, my brain immediately produces in my mind an image of this rooster although I probably have never seen it. Of course the thought will be true as far as the image represents a rooster but I will never know whether the rooster I heard is white or black, small or big, or even if the sound I heard is not just the recorded sound of a rooster that eventually exists no more or a lyre bird imitating it.

Not only our brain produces images for everything that happens but it comes often in distress because to so many possible sounds no image can fit that would be found in the limited storage of our own memory. Our mind will then invent an image in order to find peace and try to trick the user (i.e. us) in making him/her believe that the picture fits the object – which is evidently not true! On top of this

incapacity to answer so many demands our mind has the great ability to interpret what it becomes aware of and to immediately produce a judgment. It evaluates in a micro-second what it perceives and divides it into good or bad according to its own preferences. As I described it before, it writes also the script of what other people are meant to do, how they should behave, what they should think and feel in order to fit into our own world of representations, into our own construct of the world. We believe that we are the navel of what we see happening around us and we try to fit it into our world view and to make it correspond to our expectations. In doing so we betray more ourselves than the reality we try to grasp.

Byron Katie¹⁰ has well described how we never stop measuring the surrounding according to our expectations and how we prevent others from being who they are, while we make ourselves extremely unhappy because our thoughts lead us into turmoil and prevent us from enjoying what is as it is, i.e. as a perfect expression of life that we would consider with the deepest calm and joy if we were free from our preconceptions. This enforced unhappiness onto ourselves shows how much our thoughts generate our self-created misfortune and prevent us from living a good life. Byron Katie proposes a method made of four questions destined to challenge any thought that concerns our expectations of what anybody else should do or be or about any situation that we judge. The method seems so extremely simple that we tend to discard it when we do not see immediately how much power it has to help us solve our daily problems.

First Byron Katie proposes that we write down a few sentences that describe how we feel about a given stressful situation or, more

¹⁰ Byron Katie: *Loving what is: four questions that can change your life*. Rider, 2002.

powerful, about a stressful relationship to a person who lives in our direct proximity. To help us describe the situation, she asks first six questions:

- 1) In this situation, who angers, confuses, saddens, or disappoints you, and why? (*Example: I am angry with Jim because he doesn't listen to me*).
- 2) In this situation, how do you want them to change? What do you want them (not) to do? (*Example: I want Jim to see that he is wrong. I want him to stop lying to me. I want him to see that he is killing himself*).
- 3) In this situation, do you need, expect anything from them? (*Example: Jim should take a deep breath. He should calm down. He should see that his behaviour frightens me. He should know that being right is not worth another heart attack*).
- 4) In order for you to be happy in this situation, what do you need them to think, say, feel, or do? (*Example: I need Jim to hear me when I talk to him. I need him to take care of himself. I need him to admit that I am right*).
- 5) What do you think of them in this situation? Make a list. Remember, be petty and judgmental. (*Example: Jim is unfair, arrogant, loud, dishonest, way out of line, and unconscious*).
- 6) What is it about this situation that you don't ever want to experience again? (*Example: I don't ever want Jim to lie to me again. I don't ever want to see him ruining his health again*).

Then Byron Katie proposes to question the thoughts that have been written down in the previous exercise. She asks four questions which constitute the core of the method:

- 1) Is it true?
- 2) Can you (or I) absolutely know that it is true?

- 3) How do you (or I) react when you (or I) think that thought?
- 4) How would you (or I) be without that thought?

When one starts questioning these statements (these thoughts) we notice how they are a construct of our own and how much these thoughts we have generated make us unhappy.

Then she proposes a turn-around, i.e. one expresses the same statement (the thought) in the negative form or in inverting the subject and the object. For instance “he should listen to me” becomes “I should listen to him” or “I should listen to myself”, etc. In practising the method, one notices soon that the turn-around, in its new form, reveals a deep truth that may well indicate the future path for getting rid of the thought and free of this imprisoning concept.

Byron Katie affirms that we should filter all our thoughts with this method and test in this way our diverse forms of relationships with the world, with others and with ourselves. This radical questioning of anything we may think is probably a “rigorous” path towards deep innocence in the way it relies on knowledge but keeps always ready to evolve and follow the flow of life. Although the method could be assessed as a Yang practice because it is structured, it nevertheless dares to challenge what seems to be established and opens to the unknown, back to an attitude of innocence that welcomes what is as it is. This acceptance is evidently very much a Yin attitude.

This approach of systematic questioning is radical because it puts the mind back into the real place of the creative dimension of our person that captures impressions and transforms them into many reactions. The process is evidently very lively and creative as long as it does not imprison us into a narrow world that we build as a fiction. It is why the systematic questioning of whatever arises in our own minds is a

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way to enjoy the creativity of the process without getting enclosed by it. We learn then to marvel at the infinite creativity of our mind that proposes images, dreams, verbal expressions that even do not need to be true. They are just no more than creative and gratuitous acts of the mind that never stops, a bit like a sewing machine, to produce patterns or thoughts that can be enjoyed for their single capacity of creation beyond any need for these thoughts to be implemented in changing our world. When we learn to follow this method of questioning our thoughts we discover a way of being that is directly in touch with the energy of life. We live in the present and open ourselves to the richness of just being, without any after-thought, without any need to implement everything that pops up in our mind. We can then observe how thoughts, emotions, impressions, etc... are not actions of our own but events that happen to us and in us. It is like a show of which we would be the spectators, without being truly involved except as witnesses. You sit and watch and enjoy. Even if it looks mad, or unrealistic or just completely out of place, you can enjoy because you know it is not real. Without judgement, but only joy.

This awareness becomes typically the joy of the witness when this joy is part of everything that happens but does not depend onto it, whether we like it or not. There can be sunshine or rain, hot or cold, enmity or love, there remains in any case always the same quality of joy in life. This is certainly the perfect wisdom which is not easy to experience in continuity but which nevertheless truly provides authentic joy and peace. This method shakes the process while it questions the result. Life becomes a direct experience when it is no more a project for transforming what is.

Process and result

Western linear cultures tend to focus on the product (result); traditional circular cultures care for the quality of the process.

Our western civilisation thinks in linear terms. It means our way of thinking follows a line that progresses systematically and rationally from one premise to a next statement which is a deduction of the precedent one then to the next step of a rational and coherent development until one reaches the final term, the conclusion.

On the contrary traditional cultures are said to think in circular ways. It means one goes from one statement to the next by constructing a story or a myth which partly repeats and revisits precedent statements in adding details and in completing the picture by changing slightly what has been described. It is a bit like a bird of prey rising slowly while describing circles in a form of spiral. One goes many times over the same place (the same topic) but each time with a slightly different and more complete view.

These two ways of thinking are evidently very different and not only follow very different paths but also bring very different fruits. The aim of the former (the linear way) is to reach the end as soon as possible. It is very much result-oriented. By contrast the aim of the latter is to enjoy the process itself of telling the story and creating new links between themes but especially between the teller and the listeners. There is no hurry to come to the end of the path and there is much joy in repeating what has already been said. This approach is mainly process-oriented.

One can easily see how much the former one is a Yang pattern while the latter one follows a Yin pattern. Evidently these two ways do not exclude each other but on the contrary are very complementary.

Nevertheless they form two different and pretty much opposed ways of looking at the world. It is rare to meet people who are at ease with both ways in equal manners and can apply the one or the other indifferently depending on which one is the most suitable for the given circumstances.

Our western society, with its market domination and its fascination for production, consumption and profit, is clearly focussed on the result and neglects to consider the quality of the process. Consequently work and living conditions degrade while growth happens for the profit of a few. They say that the aim justifies the means. The market, and our whole society, is at war, one against the other, in order to get the final award. On the contrary traditional societies, because they are weak and fragile, know that they have to cultivate the quality of the process because it allows caring for, and involving all, so that nothing gets lost and the participation may be maximal. Of course this is only the basic principle and facts do not follow strictly this pattern because this is only a pattern and reality is much more complex. Yet one can consider how much in traditional societies the care for the process is dominant and combines with a circular approach that focuses on the joy of interaction and relationships. The process becomes the cause, if not even the pretext, for creating new links and interactions. Sometimes even the end product gets forgotten on the way and nothing is especially achieved. Yet joy remains.

The present book is built in a similar Yin way with a rather circular form of expression. It is not constructed on a rational linear process. It is made out of a series of topics which are described each one by a first sentence that summaries the following explanation, one after the other, as one picks fruits from a tree and puts them into a basket, or more exactly a bottle stand. One can then remove one bottle (topic)

and replace it by a more thorough description, or even another topic, without the whole demonstration collapsing. By addition of successive touches or descriptions, like stains of colours, the picture arises slowly according to a least structured pattern. This method allows to describe complexity without freezing it into a solid state, but keeping it moving and flowing.

It is clear that, in our western society, our daily practice is very far from this circular pattern. We became slaves of a dominant economic system entirely focussed on production and growth and profit. We see clearly how this negative energy destroys our social relationships as well as our relationship with nature. It seems we have lost our mind. Nothing makes sense anymore because we are slaves of efficiency and life yet does not surrender.

Thanks to this contrast between linear and circular ways and between result-oriented and process-oriented forms of attention we may become more aware of the huge potential the latter approach provides as a healing remedy for our sick society. Here again we need more Yin and less Yang. We need to focus on the quality of processes more than on efficiency in order to open new ways for creativity, care, love, equality and justice. It seems that more care for the quality (Yin) of processes will bring more quality in our relationships and liberate us from our obsession for quantity (Yang). Efficiency does not vanish so far.

We need then to concentrate on the quality of the process. It will completely change our world. If we look at how much the process is inhabited by a sense of equity, by an intention to leave nobody behind or aside, to care that all needs are covered for all, that life conditions improve through the process itself, we become transformed: such a process cannot anymore be dominated by

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materialistic obsessions but equity arises and the quality of justice and peace reconquers what was left to the domination of false laws and justifications that were only the concern of a minority and were blindly accepted by the majority without having been tested. A deep attention to the quality of the process transforms it and frees it into a creative act of transformation that relies mainly on human relationships and no more criteria of material efficiency or greed for impossible conditions of growth and profit that would destroy our environment (social as much as natural).

Institution and intuition

Institutions structure our lives but the true source of life remains in the intuitions that animate the structure, from emptiness to form.

As soon as a social group takes shape around a project, a belief, a concern, etc., this shape is structured and often framed into a more or less formal institution: association, club, church, temple, state service, etc. Such an institution has the role to protect and organise the processes inside the corpus it has to structure and to manage also the external exchanges with the “outer” world. Probably for reasons linked with an instinctive human need for power and control as well as a fear for what is not well mastered and remains open to too much spontaneity, any institution has the tendency to regiment the corpus and to choke its spontaneity and creativity in the name of efficiency, order, safety and common wisdom: the wisdom that already knows what is suitable and what is not.

Generally we may observe how the institution as structure slowly, step by step, supplants the body itself. It means that the logic of the machine takes over its fundamental function or meaning. We assist then how decisions are taken no more in order to serve the purpose or

the aspirations of the members as a community motivated by a common intuition but to develop the structure itself, independently of its aim, and to increase the constraining role of its functioning. The purpose or aim or vocation of the group is slowly replaced by the mechanical constraints imposed by the safeguard of the machine. This process has killed many religions, many social and political movements, many schools of thoughts, even many artistic trends.

Health services develop in the way they are no more able to answer the needs of the patients but are regulated by the power of the medical body that decides which kind of health has to be implemented. Remedies and treatments become a means of control over the life of the patients and generate secondary effects which are often worse than the illness itself. Health services develop as a machine that disempowers patients in the name of the science of a few specialists who, through overspecialisation, have lost the overview of what human beings are living through in their broader experience of life that includes so many more aspects than the functioning of a particular organ. Home care is ever more abandoned (except in the purpose of reducing costs) and assistance by relatives as well as simple traditional remedies are abandoned at the profit of an ever growing institution: the hospital.

Education services, i.e. schools, universities, professional trade institutes, etc., have lost the function of providing people with personal development opportunities because they are meant to deliver an end school or training certificate in order to provide some measurable criteria for the selection of workers who are expected to serve the purposes of a global economic system before they are encouraged to develop their own skills and creativity at the service of their own community.

Temple or Church institutions, whether they are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, etc., are in charge of defining the right doctrine and to impose it onto the faithful. Personal spiritual experience is meant to be replaced by mere theory about the “unfathomable mystery”. “God is put in a box” in order to be better “mastered”.

In these three examples, one can observe how there is a powerful inversion of the meaning of what was meant to serve the aspirations of a group of inspired people or users and finishes by imposing a logic which is not only completely foreign to the original vocation but even radically antagonistic to it. The servant has become the oppressor.

I will come back later to this topic of institutions because it plays a very important role in the way people in our society become the slaves of a system that have lost the spirit of service and has been replaced by a rather totalitarian system. This totalitarian dimension should not be understood in the sense that the police rings at our doors at 6am to get us into prison but that the main trends of our social construct are defined by forces which impose coercively (regulations, constraint of economic forces, exclusion and marginalisation in case of non-adaptation, seduction by values which are anti-life or at least anti-human, etc.) many forms of behaviour that are contrary to the laws of life and the building up of a true human community.

We will also see, as Ivan Illich has so well demonstrated, how the more an institution is inefficient the more it gets additional subsidies in order to develop more complexity and complementary services to be added to a corpus that is basically dysfunctional, instead of seeing that the principle itself of the given institution has gone mad and

needs therefore to be replaced by a fundamentally different approach and anthropology.

The institution has walls and these walls become the fences that segregate the people who are inside the walls (the ones who use the institution, serve it or believe in it) from the people who stay outside the walls: the “sceptics”. Once again we assist at the segregation between “us” and the “others”. The institution becomes the judge of the ones who do not belong to it, in terms of exclusion and condemnation, because the institution erects itself as a judge of the world in reference to its own existence as if its own logic were the navel of the universe.

It was necessary to describe the settings of institutions before we could describe what makes here sense in terms of femininity and masculinity. The structure of the institution is evidently a Yang tendency while the aspiration that animates the original vocation is a Yin energy. Both are necessary and complementary as I have described earlier about nurturing and structuring. The structure plays an evident necessary role in order to offer a skeleton to an aspiration which has to find its own forms of expression. Yet it happens in the three examples I illustrated just here above that the structure has taken over the meaning of the body. In health it imposes scientific means in the hand of powerful specialists that do not consider the human being as a whole. In education it transforms an opportunity for the development of personal potential and creativity into a standard or calibre that has to be satisfied to provide the necessary cogs (workers, consumers) for the global economic system. In spirituality it defines the right dogma to be believed in as if life were just a question of having the right official belief when it is indeed rather a personal experience that leads us onto unknown paths of

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personal evolution and transformation towards, we hope, more joy and more peace.

This radical inversion that all types of institutions have tendency to generate consists in the fact that the normal bottom-up law of life and spontaneity is replaced or at least repressed by top-down authoritarian power that decides what should be. We can observe how the Yang energy that was meant to structure the process in order to protect it and make it more expressive has turned into a form of over-simplification that represses the original Yin energy of intuition at the expense of a meaning giving spirit of discovery. It is also clear that the recessive character of intuition and creativity, when it is confronted to the authority of a dominating and imposing power, gives way to this force of destruction, even when the latter is meant to serve the purpose of all people. It is indeed a trait of institutions to claim to reinforce their power in the name of the service they are meant to deliver.

Temporarily, at this stage of the investigation, we can say that institutions can only be made alive and faithful to their mission if they are dismantled and dis-structured in order to let intuition and bottom-up creativity become again the leading forces. There is a false belief that dominates our conventional wisdom: this is the belief that the specialist and the authority know better than the people on the shop floor. It is indeed the contrary: people are in touch with their own reality and know it best. They sometimes lack the wider view that would able them to remedy the ills they are confronted to but they have nevertheless the knowledge through the experience of everyday life. Specialists can only help if they bring their specialised knowledge in complement of this basic user knowledge and not against it. If they do not respect the fundamental intuition of people who are directly concerned by their own destiny, they will

disempower them and impose a false logic which may be justified from a purely narrow and short term technical point of view but can never be as all-encompassing and creative as any other form of direct concern. In other words the true life of any group or institution relies more on the inspiration, intuition and experience of its own members than on the authority of its specialists. We need therefore to give back space and protection to the Yin energies that will nourish this spirit of creativity and endeavour, and strictly control and restrict the forces of domination which have the tendency to reduce the complex movement of life to a mere caricature of reality. And we need also to better nourish this elementary spirit of creativity and endeavour.

In our incarnated life we are meant to give shape to what cannot be visible. We have to find new forms of expression for the qualities of justice, equity, reciprocity, care and love. These unfathomable dimensions and mysteries take their origin in what one calls Emptiness: this indescribable fullness of life that is not tangible although so real that it impacts onto us so drastically and may well generate the true happiness we all aspire to.

Reconnecting with nature as a Source / Teacher

A great liberation: stop considering Nature as a heap of resources (Yang) but see Her as the great Source that feeds/teaches us (Yin).

Following the mentality of market that is based on exploitation of anything that can serve its purpose of growth and increase of profit, we just consider nature as a provider of what we need that we can grab at our convenience. We forget to look at it from a more systemic point of view that reveals itself to us as a complex body of interactions that are all interdependent. We believe we may dominate nature when indeed we are part of it and we belong to it or exactly to

Her. She is indeed the Source or Father / Mother who nourishes us and teaches us the true essence of the laws of life.

Our attitude of domination is evidently based on presumption and ignorance. We only want to see what is convenient for us: resources that we can use at our own will and rhythm. This is again a Yang attitude that goes against the true essence of Nature (Yin).

When we consider Nature as the visible part of expression of a whole Universe (World 2 in the precedent description of the three worlds) whose dimensions and mystery we cannot grasp (World 1), we open into a new relationship with the world in which we live. This new relationship is based on more respect, even on wonder, and on an attitude that is more able to listen. It does not need to impose its own law but observes the true nature of things and is in a position to better understand, and fit into, a context that in any case is the direct environment that nourishes us and reveals to us the true laws of life. This other attitude is clearly animated by a Yin energy of acceptance and a spirit of adaptation.

The focus of our attention shifts from our own self-constructed world centred on our own needs and projections (World 3) to an all-encompassing view of the context in which we live. This main shift opens the door to a real adaptation to what is as it is, instead of pursuing a struggle that puts us in sharp conflict with our environment. This environment is not only the natural frame in which we live but it also includes all other human beings and other forms of sentient beings.

When we learn to perceive that there is a Universe that we have to adapt to, because it is the master that defines the frame in which we

live and we are not able to change it, we may discover the potential of adaptation not as a restriction but on the contrary as a new opening to a very different quality of life. This discovery is based on an apparent contradiction: it provides freedom because it relies on the acceptance of a new constraint! To better explain this apparent contradiction, I will refer to what I have exposed previously, about Emptiness and form, when I have described three worlds: the first world as the invisible world of our true essence, the second world as the natural world that is an expression that makes the first world visible, and the third world as the world that is the one we construct through our own projections and actions in shaping our environment not according to the laws of world 1 or 2 but according to our own desires and thoughts which are, as we have seen, in most cases twisted and falsified by our fears, passions, desires and lack of trust.

Nature typically is part of the second world that reveals to us (makes visible) the first world we cannot see. Nature is an expression of the true essence of life. By observing it we learn about the meaning of life and the forces that rule it. In listening to it we discover that the laws we have accepted and that foster our third world (the world of our own construct and projections) are false and the way they are in contradiction with the laws of world 2 explains to us the causes of our suffering. This is precisely how nature makes us free: it (she) liberates us from a false conception and opens us to a new vision of life, to a new anthropology. It shows us how market forces are based on an inversion of the meaning of life. Instead of fostering cooperation in diversity and complementarity (as Nature does) market imposes its laws of competition, standardisation and struggle of one against the other. In becoming aware of the true nature of natural laws (cooperation, diversity, complementarity, evolution toward more consciousness, imagination, creativity) and in accepting spontaneously their constraint because we are convinced of their

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authenticity, we may escape the false laws we have established ourselves in creating a world 3 that is characterised by an unjust social and economic system based on premises of exploitation and infinite growth that are not even possible on a finite planet. The acceptance of the constraint of world 2 (which is indeed an expression of the true nature of world 1) makes us free from the false constraints of world 3. This is the great revolution!

Indeed we never stop, in our false world 3, to submit to laws we find unjust and nevertheless accept as if they were the true laws. We believe that they are unavoidable and that we have to resign and submit to them although we find them unjust and they are not bearable. We never stop compromising because of our misplaced ideology of the powerful domination of market. We accept the laws of economics of our capitalist system as if they were the most important laws that would bring happiness when they only bring havoc, oppression, suffering and unending deterioration of our social and life condition without mentioning the radical destruction of our natural environment. We believe that economic relationships, which are an evident necessity and are unavoidable as such, are obligatorily based on the laws of market we have created, i.e. these means are inevitably generating injustice and oppression because they can only be based on exploitation. But the observation of nature reveals to us a completely different view of what economy truly is. Nature is indeed a perfect model of what economics should be (as well as a teaching of sociology, politics and art): a simple network of relationships of harmony on one hand with the context that provides everything we need and on the other hand with our fellow humans with whom we may share what we have because cooperation brings true wealth (it is what nature teaches us). The liberation from these false laws of oppression of market, made possible by our observation of the “new” laws of nature and their acceptance that leads to natural and social

adaptation, opens a new chapter. If the laws of economics, of oppression and exploitation are false, it means that we can reconstruct another society based on much more convivial conditions, in harmony with the laws of cooperation that nature reveals to us. The good news is that we can readapt the network of our human relationships to the new logic of this new anthropology. We are free from market and we can construct a better social network, based on the premises of equity, creativity, peace, care and respect, etc.

The true purpose of economics

Instead of generating growth and profit for a few, economics have to satisfy basic needs and provide good life conditions for all.

Market is the antithesis of nature but it plays nevertheless a similar role of revelation. As I have just shown nature reveals to us what are the fundamental laws of life. Nature illustrates (or makes visible) how our true Self is made alive when it relates to the true essence of the source of life which nature reveals us very pragmatically in showing us what matters and what are the true energies of life. On the contrary, market is making apparent how the world of our projections and illusions transforms everything into a nightmare when we encourage, and base our evolution on, the worse tendencies of humanity: greed, egoism, exploitation, violence. These trends are not necessarily the natural trends of human nature; I believe they are rather the negative expressions of disarray when social conditions, under the power of perverse or ignorant minds, become a threat for our persons and our capacity for life and attraction for happiness. The mechanisms of market reveal in this way the characteristics of our false Self when we try to conquer the three false Ps: power, prestige, pleasure. Not that these dimensions of life are bad as such, but they prove to be the illusions into which we fall when, under the influence

of fear or under the power of conformism to the dominating model, we are ready to do anything to promote our own interest at the expense of others.

The fundamental question for our western society today is: what is the role of economics? This question reveals itself to be fundamental for our future, not because economics is so central in our personal or collective destinies, but precisely because it is not so essential but it has yet today invaded all dimensions of life and has become the major factor that determines our evolution, present and future.

Although this question belongs more to the topic of the next chapter, that will describe the terms of our fundamental choices to be made today, I need here to present already a few aspects concerning the role of economics, for the good reason that, in invading all aspects of our life, it prevents us from being free and evolved human beings. I will just make here a few central remarks and we will then come back to this question in the next chapter.

Today we may observe how the economic system as a whole has become a powerful machine that regulates our lives. Most of important decisions taken on the political or social levels are related to the role of economics or, more exactly, how much no decision dares to challenge the role of economics we have made so far the fundament of our evolution. “The market says that we cannot afford to...” is the most frequent form of justification of any bad or coward decision, as if the market were an omnipotent god that would take revenge if we would dare to turn our back to this false god.

What is the role of economics? There are fundamentally in my opinion two possible answers to that question:

- 1) What we do today: its role is to increase production to increase profit to increase growth and wealth, Whatever the price of such endeavour can be for the majority of all people, workers and consumers, so that rich people may invest more and, maybe if we are lucky, the poorest will have a small share in the yield. Economics is an aim as such; it leads our society. Growth is its basic rule.
- 2) What we have to do tomorrow: its role is to satisfy the basic needs of all, offer equal and good conditions of life for all, provide work conditions that allow for each person the development of creativity and skills and may generate social recognition for the ones who are generous with their gifts and allow local communities becoming places where life can be experienced, invented and lived. Economics is only a means for shared happiness. Care is its rule.

The description of both terms of the alternative above makes the preference of choice evident when the two terms are described in this way. Yet we do not follow the direction the second answer defines. As corollary of the above alternative we have then to ask: what are our means today to escape the dreadful future that the unilateral domination of economics will impose onto us: increase of destruction in social relationships, growing gap between poor and rich, more inequality and injustice leading to more violence, stronger despair for disempowered people (fanaticism, terrorism), increased destruction of nature and increasing imbalances in climatic change, etc.

The answer to the question “what to do?” probably resides in the double revelation I have described: nature reveals to us what the fundamental laws of life are and market reveals to us the trends we should not encourage as expressions of our weakest points in our human nature. In other words we need to implement a social frame

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which will encourage and provide the best conditions for the expression of our most creative and generous attitudes and aptitudes and which will prevent the development of dominating trends that do not serve the general interest. This simple sentence seems to be the description of a far ideal that seems out of reach. Yet it is a very simple instruction that we are well capable to follow with our relatives, in our own family or with our friends and neighbours, when general conditions are fair and help for the expression of our best trends. It means these conditions are realistic for any form of local and regional development which is basically where life conditions are defined for what matters the most. On the further stage there is the question of how to relate to external pressures. Let's ignore this aspect so far until we have provided the tools to handle this question.

In other words we may observe how the forces of market have generated a world (world 3) that is in deep contradiction with our humanity because they are opposed to the laws of life (world 2 making world 1 visible). It means the condition of success according to the laws of world 2 is to keep these forces of market in check, under control. To do that we need to define rules of equity, justice, care and solidarity and to control that all our decisions respond to that requirement of a development that respect our human values. I will attempt to show in the next chapter how this option is not at all opposed to the necessity to provide subsistence for all and even good conditions of life. This restriction of the forces of market is simply the fundamental condition. How could we have good conditions of life if we do not care in priority for them? This is then the new priority: instead of the destructive domination by market, the inspiring leading energy of humanity.

The pre-eminence of social options

To take control of its own destiny, a social group has to define the basic rules that preserve the right conditions and safeguard them.

There are many ways to formulate this rule of the pre-eminence of social options over economic or material constraints. It expresses simply the conviction that any human group is able to define the right conditions for its own evolution if people who form it are agreeable about what they wish to implement together. This aspiration for a true form of democracy based on relative consensus, that would empower all people in an equal way to master together their common life conditions and evolution, has been a long leitmotiv throughout history. Each social theory or each revolution had its own way to define the aim of providing people with the power to decide about their own destiny and to control together the social context that would allow implementing the right conditions for the thriving of a form of shared happiness. Does this leitmotiv mean that the attempt is doomed to fail, if it has been repeated so many times in history and has never brought the felicity that we would expect? I believe that the aspiration itself for the improvement of justice, equity, peace, care and solidarity is precisely the energy that allows this quality to take shape. History in my view has been fostered by this desire for a better world. It would be the topic of a whole book to demonstrate this fact and I do not have the knowledge to demonstrate this basic affirmation here in a few words but I accept it is true because it is what I may observe in our evolution.

There is evidently no perfect example of a thriving society that would have cared for all its members and that would have lasted for centuries in conditions of excellence and perfect peace. Yet there were so many attempts that have proved to be right and convincing. At a smaller or larger scale they can teach us what truly matters. We

can mention all local strategies to implement more sustainability, many local forms of developments especially in poor areas when people seriously become aware of the threat that risks to destroy them, on a more general level countries like Bhutan or Finland that aim at more equity and peace, etc.

There is for me a rule that is prevalent: everywhere where people care for the common good and are ready to give up individual privileges in order to create a more righteous society, equality has prevailed that has enable more people to access education, welfare and peace. Good equal social conditions allow visibly offering more possibilities of personal development to more people. Any equal society that cares for all its members has always thrived better than other unequal societies.

The great handicap we have in the way we look back on history is our own pathological (the word is not too strong!) fascination for power and empires. We are like seduced by show of might and by domination. On the contrary the conditions for shared happiness that would involve all members of a social group are made of very discrete and not impressive rules that seem to express a form of apparent resignation far from more powerful potential or even a form of “mediocrity” when these conditions just try to prevent domination and they care for opening new possibilities for the most disadvantaged people. Equality is evidently not as impressive as extreme luxury!

The choice of modesty remains an option that does not seduce politicians who want to impress. This is precisely the problem. Politicians or social actors are meant to bring the right solutions and not to promote their own image and simple citizens have to learn how to resist these false adepts of national grandeur. We are all meant to

become servants of a common good that will allow us thriving. Gandhi is one of the best examples of the leaders with humble profile we need. This option of modesty is in my eyes more attractive because it is inhabited by a spirit of self-limitation that dares to measure what is minimum in the care of the general good instead of what is maximum for the privilege of a few. This is our first choice to be made: self-limited path for all or excess for a few? This is the social option.

Out of this description we can be aware of two things:

The first aspect is that we need to describe the new anthropology that is needed and has to lead us in our choices of a different quality of life. This is a large theme that is very difficult to handle because it overwhelms us and takes us out of our own depth. It is why there is no way to describe a general picture of the model of society we wish to implement. Any similar approach that would paint the big fresco of the ideal setting would fall into utopia. The picture may be beautiful but the way to make it the reality of everyday would be pure theory. Therefore we will avoid this trap and we will concentrate on smaller aspects of reality because daily practicalities are the important details that make everyday life. We will in this way avoid the illusion of describing a utopia because we will remain very concrete. In this practical approach we will go from the most practical to the more general. We will build our new anthropology, not in terms of ideal virtues but in practical modalities of daily life that will express much better than a broader general theory what the conditions for a true quality of life are.

The second aspect we become aware of is the importance of the social option, i.e. of the collective awareness based on a relative consensus of which conditions have to be implemented and then

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protected if we want to provide good conditions for the practice of equality and care for one another. What matters is the good will and the social option. Evidently this fundamental choice for equality (social option) will not generate perfection, but the experience shows that everywhere where there is a care for equality and sharing as a principal social option, there is a special quality of life. Simply the will to provide this quality is already the necessary and minimal condition to get it. Awkwardness, ignorance, lack of experience, false understanding, conflicts of interests, and so on, will evidently not smoothen the path of any alternative society but this basic option for equality will nevertheless open this path. This is the main difference with our present society where resignation and submission to the dominant model have excluded the option to follow the path of more social justice, despite many attempts that try to answer this call for justice. The social option is therefore a fundamental condition: first because it brings people on the path of consensus, unifying their effort toward a noble path that makes them aware of what the priorities are; and secondly because it channels all energies toward a positive aim, instead of surrendering sadly to the destructive pressure of a market that brings havoc and poverty in all its meanings.

These two differences are the major aspects of the social option. We will now examine in very concrete terms what are the fundamental aspects of choice that will open this path to us if we dare to agree to make the right choice.

5) THE FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE

As I just described I will not paint the ideal picture of the perfect society (the utopia) but I want to follow a rather very concrete path on ground level that will give shape step by step to the many practical aspects of the challenge. As the reality is complex and the whole picture cannot be described as a coherent model, I will choose to present the alternative by addition of smaller pieces as one does to put in place a mandala or a mosaic: piece by piece, one after the other; and the new image will slowly appear progressively.

We will start with the description of what I call the great simplification, it means the way our market society has flattened Reality as if it were just a material convenience for our everyday life. I will show how, if we reverse the inversions created by market and technology – as well as the many simplifications which go with it - we may recover a three (or more!) dimensional image of what we are as a social and human community, instead of the flat landscape the market has created, where everything is meant to be equal, without hierarchy, without accents, without preferences. I speak here intentionally of market because, as I explained, economics has invaded and dominated every aspects of life, although it should be only a very minor and practical aspect among many others of what is our reality. Yet we will soon see how the image goes far beyond the simple choice about the market.

The easiest way to describe this alternative path consists in formulating the terms of choices that characterise the opening of the new path. Therefore these many practical modalities will be presented in terms of choices. The contrast between the two possible

terms will appear very clearly in an opposition that will emphasise the true quality of the alternative in contrast to the present practice:

- 1) On one hand I will describe the present practice and this description will soon show the illusion it is based on and the dead-end path it is driving on.
- 2) On the other hand I will describe the alternative that will appear very simple and modest because we can already do that today. The future is at hand... if we want to. We “just” need to decide to commit to this path. This “just” is the basic condition that requires a change a mind, i.e. precisely to make the choice I propose.

The contrast between these two options – either to continue on the present path or to radically change and choose the path of simplicity and solidarity – will become so evident. By removing the illusion that imprisoned us in today’s practice it will make us free to choose the path of freedom. It is essential to see that what prevents us from changing our ways of living is not so much the power of the present system as rather our own belief in its illusion or at least our resignation to accept it as it is with all its flaws and destructive aspects or our deeply entrenched feeling that our happiness (or rather our comfort) depends on continuing as we do. By removing the obstacle (the illusion) we open the new path.

I will describe these main necessary fundamental choices we have to make according to an order that goes from the principal to the subsidiary. It means the first will be the necessary condition for the second that will be the condition for the third, and so on. We will be able to observe how these choices are linked one with another and how the fact to make the first choice makes the next step of the next choice easier, and so on.

The great simplification

I call this chapter the great simplification because it shows how our economic, political and social system has simplified the laws of life, and has even inverted them, and made our reality, or at least the way we understand it, a much flattened version of what I believe it is truly. Although it is not the most essential thing in life, let's come back to, and start with, the role of economics in order to reopen the path.

1) The economic choice: profit or care?

Economics can be seen as the dominant and leading energy in our lives or as the tool to be mastered in the service / for the good of all.

As I mentioned it earlier economics (and especially the market) is said to be the leading energy to which we have to conform if we do not want to be in trouble. In political or public debate, in the comments in the media, in our fear of what seems ominous and impossible to master, the market is almost always described as a god one should not challenge. The revenge of the market is announced as the retaliation of economic forces upon human beings each time human beings dare not to behave according to the laws of market. By laws of market one should understand principally the laws of neoliberalism which is the dominant and growing ideology today that lets the prevalent forces of market economics (speculation and accumulation instead of satisfaction of true needs) define what happens; free market is said by classic economic theory to be able to regulate exchanges and re-establish lost balances: the invisible hand of the market. This hand of the market is indeed not a mechanical

reality that would foster an adequate behaviour able to adapt to creative mechanisms of balanced and equitable exchanges but it is rather a dominant ideology that is accepted in emotional terms and that becomes by force an oppressive reality to which we are obliged to submit!

As this is a very ambitious program to characterise the present practice of today in a few words I will do this in very simple terms, as a non-professional, and these terms will not avoid extreme simplifications. I'm not an economist but I'm living in this world and practice economy every day of my life, as anybody does. I will therefore use a simple language, the expression of a simple citizen which I am. The purpose is not to describe the whole reality in its modulated complexity but to emphasise the dominant mechanisms that foster the present evolution. I hope the reader will be indulgent as this attempt will inevitably be incomplete and sometimes frustrating. But it will try to show the real "bones" of our present way of thinking that is at the origin of our failure: the illusion that imprisons us!

The two terms of the choice are:

- 1) Should economics truly be the dominant and leading energy in our lives as it is the case today, focussed on profit, exploitation, competition and overproduction?
- 2) Or should economics only be one among many tools which the social option keeps under control in order to generate wellbeing for everyone and care for each member of the community in order to provide everyone with the best possible conditions of life, the best possible access to the use of the commons and allow each one offering to the community the benefice of their gifts and skills and gaining respect and social recognition in return?

Let's now examine each term on its turn.

1a) Free market: overproduction and destruction

A general thirst for profit generates overproduction that is the cause of more competition and destruction of our living conditions.

Subsistence is the traditional pattern according to which a local community produces what local people need for their everyday life. The Russian economist Alexander Chayanov - killed in 1936 by Stalin for having revealed the following truth which happened to show the limits of the kolkhoz system - formulated the law that bears his name: "the greater the ratio of workers to consumers in a household, the less each worker produces; production stops when needs are covered". This is the traditional pattern. In other words, it says that the human tendency is to work in limited measures in order to just cover the needs of the family or household. If an increased number of people work, each will work less, because the needs remain the same and are proportional to the number of consumers (members of family, helpers, guests, etc.), each one having roughly similar needs. The best example of this type of behaviour is the case of hunters-gatherers who used to stop "working" – i.e. hunting and gathering - as soon they had caught or collected what was necessary for their immediate subsistence.

According to Dominique Temple and Mireille Chabal¹¹, the corollary of Chayanov's law says: "when subsistence is ensured, the community can consecrate itself to spiritual search (creativity, dance,

relationships, rituals, art, etc.): the intensity of production becomes maximal". This law and its corollary mean that human beings, in a traditional setting that encourages their basic human nature, are more attracted by a good quality of living than by an accumulation of material goods.

I have shown earlier, in my descriptions of the stages of masculinisation throughout history, that the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, among others, have brought a form of disruption of the traditional way of living because they made us, as humankind, aware of our ability to manipulate the environment and to develop new techniques which allowed increasing production. The development of new forms of energy, and the suitable technologies that ensued out of them, allowed a much increased production that went far beyond the satisfaction of the needs of each local community. In reaction to this new (over)abundance the market had to develop and to find new outlets for this surplus of goods. Very soon production further increased as a consequence of a supplement of investment into bigger plants and more machines, made possible by the increased profit produced by the sale of increased quantities of goods on a wider market (i.e. increase number of consumers). It appeared also soon that the increase of size of production plants would allow cheaper production which was the condition for the extension of market in order to be more competitive than other producers of similar goods. This is precisely the interesting law: as one goes beyond the limits of the needs of a given local community, one has to find new outlets for the supplement of goods that do not answer local needs. The extension of the market generates competition because diverse corporations are competing for the attention of the same consumers in order to find outlet for their over-numerous goods. In order to be the winner in this competition, one

¹¹ Dominique Temple et Mireille Chabal: *La réciprocité et la naissance des valeurs humaines*. L'Harmattan, 1995, Paris.

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needs to offer better goods for a cheaper price. This is what classical economy says.

In other words, when one breaks Chayanov's law that recognises the limits of production as defined by the limits of local needs, one gets into a vicious circle. Overproduction¹² generates competition that will require producing the same goods at a cheaper price. To do that one has to increase production because a bigger plant is in general able to produce cheaper goods and the multiplication of a smaller profit per item by a larger quantity of goods allows providing a widely increased global profit. One needs then to reduce the costs of production in order to keep the same rate of profit or even to increase it. To reduce costs of production, one has to develop more technology (more machines, less workers), reduce the wages of workers, increase their productivity (more coercion), find cheaper materials (import), save on the quantities of materials or the quality of the goods that are produced. Delocalisation allows finding cheaper conditions of work in foreign countries, with fewer regulations for social security or for the protection of workers or the environment.

Profit, and satisfaction of elementary needs, becomes the leading force. This explains why growth has become so incomprehensibly the permanent leitmotiv of our economic discourse despite we know that it is not affordable on a limited planet. It is evidently the only escape way into more madness when overproduction leads the move. The most despairing aspect of this evolution is that overproduction is not even necessary because it is only the consequent "necessity" of

¹² Robert Brenner describes the role of overproduction in economic terms in his book *The Economics of global Turbulences*, 1998. This description speaks to me as it is one of the dominant factors I can observe as a simple citizen in the evolution of our present world. It seems to be one of the major tendencies that drive our world today and explain the dominance of the concept of growth.

breaking Chayanov's law. Overproduction does not bring anything in itself, except profit and more growth. This is precisely where we are at the crossroad and we have to choose: do we want to follow the path of overproduction because it satisfies the greed of a few dominant economic actors? or are we happy to respect Chayanov's law and have more time for doing less and enjoying life? This seems a very simplistic way of presenting the terms of the choice; it is yet confirmed by the observation that hunters-gatherers seem to have much more leisure time than we do today despite of what we call progress. Without going to that extreme one could envisage reducing drastically production in order to have it just to satisfy local needs. Of course the question is more complex as we live in a world of many interactions and as we have to take into account the manifold possibilities of production which vary between regions as well as many other factors of complementarity. But I won't examine these secondary issues and we will focus on this main option of self-limitation.

In order to make this explanation more complete I will just describe a few of the many consequences, for our life conditions, of this search for profit based on ever increasing quantities and for the minimal price in order for producers to increase the sales and become winners in competition. I will just mention a few points without commenting them further:

- **Work conditions:** wages are reduced; stronger pressure for productivity per worker; competition between workers; threat of dismissal; unemployment rate kept high in order to reduce power of workers; less flexibility; less physical protection, more accidents; work force as a commodity sold on market.
- **Production process:** bigger manufacturing plants; more monotonous work; more machines; technology replaces skills,

monotony because of repetitive tasks; no identification with work's result, no self-esteem.

- **Social conditions:** trade-union lose their power; opposition capital-workers; austerity measures, less social expenditures; less training possibilities, less health assistance, pension age postponed; more unemployment, less unemployment benefits.
- **Social inequity:** increase of the gap between poor and rich; marginalisation, inequality, violence, poverty, vulnerability, drugs; concentration of wealth in a few hands; less smaller businesses; more concentration of power into bigger multinational corporations worldwide; corruption of politicians.
- **Market domination:** choices by consumers are made according to prices and not to other qualitative factors; cheaper prices for imported goods reinforce importation at the expense of local production; disappearance of local trades and skills; cheap solutions for production are chosen at the expense of long term sustainability; pollution, wastes.
- **Environment:** degradation of the environment; no better regulation for protection despite awareness of climate change; short term exploitation of natural resources; no respect of natural cycles; no restoration of natural original conditions once exploitation has exhausted resources; no observation of the impact of activities, no adaptation; overproduction, overconsumption, excess use of energy, excessive transport; acceleration of climate change.
- **Degradation of professional knowledge and skills:** more machines less skills; less training, less access to university or professional schools; less local know-how; less creativity; training aiming at satisfying market's needs rather than human needs.

- **Delocalisation:** loss of local jobs and skills; disempowerment of people, decisions taken elsewhere by third parties (external major actors); competition between regions that are so different (i.e. cotton in the US and in Mali).
- **Dying of diversity:** globalisation, flattening of differences; killing of biodiversity by pollution and destruction of nature's diversity; disappearance of indigenous cultures; globalisation as standardisation on world scale, consumption of the same products everywhere.
- **Quality of goods:** degradation of the quality of goods, meant not to last long; cheaper, throw-away, no repair, waste, bad material, bad design; pollution.
- **Myth of profit:** exacerbation of false needs which are meant to generate more income than just for the compensation of the amount of expenses and work (income) that have been truly involved; greed for accumulation; despise for the satisfaction of clients.
- **Myth of growth:** growth is meant to happen endlessly on a limited planet; growth as escape for solving a problem that it accentuates (overproduction); conquest for new markets at the expenses of poorer populations, creation of false needs; exacerbation of competition where more or less peaceful exchanges traditionally were satisfying most people; imbalance in exchanges between poor and rich regions when profits circulate always in the same direction (from poor to rich); extension of market as plundering of local resources elsewhere; export of pollution and energy consumption.
- **Fall of profitability:** overproduction and higher competition generate a reduction of sale prices and a loss in profitability (according to classic economics); it prevents the fair compensation for work that becomes a simple commodity to be

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sold on the market; conditions for work and general condition of living degenerate.

- **Increase of speculation:** as profitability in manufacturing falls, investors turn to more speculative adventures; finance becomes a source of profit as such although it does not produce anything; stock exchange develops; benefices for investors deprives workers from their own income; the part of national wealth due to speculation increases while the part of wealth due to work decreases.
- **Rise of competitive nations:** because of the opening of markets, “young nations” arise that are more competitive because they may create their new manufacturing sector in more efficient conditions (newer technology, cheaper work force, less regulation); they conquer new shares of the market (e.g. China) at the expense of rich nations; the economic health of these older nations suffer from recession; the working class of these nations see their living condition degrade (delocalisation of their work place, reduction of their wages, increasing unemployment, reduction of social protection, etc.).
- **Growing resentment:** poorer working classes (mainly in richer countries) are abandoned to misery; growing resentment towards political leaders and society; increase of social tension and distrust in democratic processes (fanaticism, terrorism, far-right votes, Trump effect).
- **Debtocracy:** infinite increase of private, public and corporation debt; as people have no more buying power because of the reduction of their wages, banks propose to them facilities for credit (private debt, credit cards); credit as a game for speculation; states get also indebted because they try to stimulate demands by engaging public works paid by money they do not have (public debt, Keynesianism) because of restrictions on the taxation system that does not dare to bill the rich; interest rates

cumulate and condemn borrowers to collapse; excessive profits for the banks; bankruptcy of poorer states (e.g. Greece in the EU).

- **Unjust taxation:** governments do not dare to tax wealth and higher incomes to allow redistribution of accumulated wealth in favour of the whole population; complete lack of politics for redistribution or equality.
- **Dilapidation of the Commons:** the Commons (common wealth such as public infrastructure, social knowledge, public space, nature, etc.) are dismantled and sold to private interests (patents); local citizens are deprived of their own common wealth.
- **Export of wealth:** goods are exported, cash is sent away to sellers and does not remain local (loss of local buying and investing power); excess in exports in relation to imports for rich countries allows them getting richer; wealth goes from poor to rich regions where it concentrates, no cycles of return; impoverishment of the source (killing the goose with the golden eggs).
- **Absence of political perspective:** the political leaders have no vision of where they want to lead the country; no sense of the political frame as a social project that involves all people; no political courage to attempt to control the wild forces of economics and speculation; frequent confusion between private and public interests; political interests corrupted by economic pressures, weakening of political awareness, disempower of citizens in national or regional decisions; media corruption.
- **Invasion of poor countries:** western industrial activities invade poorer countries because they “offer” work conditions that are less constraining (social protection, environment, totalitarian systems); goods are sold although they do not answer local needs; natural resources are exploited until destruction (minerals, fossil fuels, food); political intervention or even military invasion to

ensure the conditions needed by big corporations and dominance of the neoliberal model.

We could continue this list of flaws almost endlessly. One aspect remains yet the dominant one and is rarely mentioned. This is the fact that we are the main actors of this system and we accept to collaborate mainly for four reasons which are more in our head than out there:

- 1) **The great inversion:** First we deny that there is a strong antagonism between the logic of this competitive system and the laws of life. As soon as we will be free enough to see this deep contradiction (the laws of market are the inversions of the laws of life), we will be unable to collaborate anymore with this form of self-destruction.
- 2) **Resignation:** Secondly we believe that the flaws of the system are inevitable or should be fixed. We do not want to see that they are intrinsically inherent to the system and that the whole system is based on false premises. We accept these flaws as a price to pay for the privileges we believe we get from the system. We adopt an attitude of resignation.
- 3) **Main actors:** Thirdly we are indeed the main participators and supporters of the present state. We are as citizens, workers and consumers the principal agents of this development. If we stop collaborate with it and stop consuming tomorrow, the system will collapse. Without us it is nothing and will be inoperative. Its future depends on us. It is why the social option is so important. We have indeed a maximum of power.
- 4) **A high price for each of us:** but a relatively small improvement in what concerns the whole system. Each of our choices to restrain our impact on the natural or social environment costs us a lot in terms of effort or personal sacrifice but has nevertheless

only a small positive impact on the general state of the Planet. Yet the world is what we make it by aggregate of these small personal contributions.

We could continue endlessly this description of what prevents us from being free. I believe this is enough so far to show that the neoliberal ideology is based on false premises and brings only destruction. It is time now to see what the alternative is.

1b) Economics in the service of solidarity

When we share wealth and care for the wellbeing of each one all members of the community thrive and the total wealth is greater.

I have mentioned four illusory reasons why we collaborate. Now, in order to open the way to an alternative, we have first to identify the three main principles most people find so fundamental that ground the present practice of economics but are indeed confusing illusions or rather misleading confusions:

- 1) The first false belief is the belief in ownership. This statement seems shocking because we are all impregnated by the belief that it is good to own something. Yet we came naked to this world and we will leave it naked too. It does not mean that we can't own our toothbrush. It means that neoliberalism is based on the assumption that we have to own anything we use. This is a terrible confusion between ownership and use. What matters in fact is the use or more exactly the freedom of access to the use. When we go to school we want to learn and we do not care who owns the building in which we learn. The same for the road on which we drive or even the house in which we live. As long the owner does not control the way we live in it, it does not matter

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who it is. It can be mine or yours, or John's or Mary's. Private property is indeed the negation of free access to use. It deprives me from using what is yours and it deprives you from using what is mine. When we can use indifferently what is yours and what is mine we get richer. Of course, practically remains the question of the care and maintenance for what we use, i.e. in which state we leave it behind us. This is the question of responsibility and this is another question. What matters here is the terrible confusion we are used to make between ownership and access to usage.

- 2) The second false belief is the assumption that profit is legitimate. Here again there is a big confusion between income and profit. Income is the compensation for our work and the time we have given while profit is a part of speculation. Profit detaches the part of value of a good that is embedded in it but that I can separate from this good when I sell it, because I can sell it at a higher price than what it has cost me in terms of real expenses and work I have invested in it. When I detach a part of the value of the good and keep it for me, I steal from the community what it has invested in it (out of the Commons in terms of knowledge, natural resources, social security, public infrastructure, etc.) and which is part of the good to be transferred. When I appropriate myself this part of value, I deprive the community from it. It means the price of the good is higher and this value is no more part of the good when it stays in my pocket. On the contrary, if I do not keep it for myself, it continues to circulate with the good that becomes more accessible because cheaper, and the quality that has been embedded into the good remains with it. Any good is made of natural resources, of energy, of embedded work, of knowledge, of care, of creativity, etc. All these qualities should remain embedded in the good and not separated from it because they are all the fruits of a common work that represents the resources and the skills of the community as a whole. It is fair I get an income

from my work (see restriction below!) but it is not fair I steal part of the common wealth that is embedded in the good and can be detached when I speculate on its sale price.

- 3) The third false assumption concerns the relationship between income (or wage) and subsistence. We tend to believe that wage is a reward for work, but it is a great mistake. Income or the ability to ensure one's own subsistence does not come as a reward for work but it is the contrary: subsistence comes first in order to allow us to work. It means we need to ensure our subsistence in order to be able to work, and work includes not only what brings money but any activity in general: cut the wood, tell a story to my kids, take care of my wife, welcome the stranger, write a story, repair my roof, invent a new tool, dream, or do nothing. Despite the fact that this confusion (between subsistence as a condition for work and work as a condition for subsistence) poisons our life, we never stop doing the right thing: we take care of our children and offer them subsistence free of charge in order to allow them learning, working, etc. Only because our subsistence is ensured may we work. Subsistence comes first and work second. Wage is not a reward but a necessary condition for work. Wage allows work and not the contrary. Here again the market has created a huge inversion, and we believe it.

When we have eliminated these three confusions out of our way, the path for a very different way of practising economic exchanges opens up. Instead of being understood as a leading ideology charged by emotionality and false beliefs, economics may be liberated of its inversions and may become a pure practicality that is submitted to the control by the community. This means that economics can be controlled by the social option I have described, i.e. the choice for a social quality of life that will rule over economics. If this social option consists in caring for the wellbeing of all and in sharing

common wealth, the dimensions of ownership, of profit and of reward disappear in the background because they are no more essential as soon as they are recognised as illusions. We can then extend to the circle of the local community what we already practise daily in our own family circle or neighbourhood. We can care for each one of us and concentrate on the aim that equity may be real and allow each one to access most necessary and desirable goods and services and that the community cares to create favourable conditions for each one to thrive. Don't tell me it is utopic! It is already what we do in our family and neighbourhood circles and it answers probably our natural trend as human beings to be good and to hope to be seen and recognised for who we are. Of course it is essential that the social context encourages this type of behaviour and it is precisely where the big change happens: when we decide to care one for the other instead of fighting one against another and when we are able to make this choice as a collective group (it can be very small) and decide about the basic conditions to implement this choice..

Such a type of economics is characterised by a small scale:

- It favours local production in order to produce locally most of what is needed.
- It creates good work conditions in order to help people see what they produce and be able to identify with it, or be recognised as the creators of such things.
- There is a common commitment to sell and buy locally. Local money gets reinvested locally and circulates locally. It generates local exchanges.
- A local currency may help to protect the local circuits because it is not convertible into external currencies.

- It means small businesses can develop and are supported in their diversity and complementarity.
- Small credit help people to set up a creative activity that serves the community and allows them to be recognised for who they are. Banks are in the hands of the local community and do not seek financial profits but aim at providing opportunities for people.
- Taxes are a way to redistribute wealth. Subsidies help also the members of the (local, regional, national) community who are disadvantaged. Governments care for equality, i.e. to correct the nature of social, politic and economic processes in order to have them provide equality instead of having to correct their effects by aid (compensation) measures.
- Local skills and knowledge develop. Education is free and tends to make knowledge available to all. Creativity becomes an important part of work. It generates satisfaction and pride.
- A small workshop is able to produce a simple car that can be adapted to the special needs of the buyer: 2 or 4 seats, with tray, for handicap person, solar, etc., even if some parts and materials need to be provided from further away.
- Prices are much higher but are also partly compensated by simplicity. The simple car described above is basically much cheaper although it provides better wages.
- Equality allows each one to earn approximately the same amount. We all have similar needs. Shared wealth and exclusion of profit make equality possible. There is a general recognition of a minimal income; similarly there should be a recognition of a maximum decent income too.
- Knowledge is part of the commons as well as health, education, justice, etc. These qualities are shared and even provided freely.
- More educated people have received more from society. They are expected to return more. In this way they do not earn more than

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simple workers. Nobody is forced to become a medical practitioner or a lawyer. Diversity is more important than hierarchy.

- The contrast between work and leisure disappears slowly as any activity is an opportunity for creativity. Work is a contribution to the wellbeing of the local community.
- According to Chayanov's law, people can offer their work and skills free of charge as soon their subsistence is ensured.
- One could even imagine a basic income provided without conditions to ensure firstly subsistence and allow creativity in a free way. But maybe it would be a form of assistance that could have negative consequences.
- And many other characteristics in the same spirit of offering favourable conditions to all in order to generate common wellbeing. It is important to notice how the common wealth becomes in this pattern the main function, and no more private property.

The most amazing thing is that we can start tomorrow or even today. Are there not two people in this room who can agree about the necessary common conditions to be happy? Then let's start.

2) The community choice: me or the others?

Individualism can be seen as the law that serves my own interest or as the hindrance to true shared wealth based on interdependency.

This is the second choice that is subsidiary to the precedent about the role and place of economics. This second question consists in knowing whether my interests are best defended when I act in

competition against fellow human beings or whether cooperation allows us to be more enriched by common goods.

In this latter case the commons, i.e. the public sphere with all its components (knowledge, wisdom, health, education, consensus, maturity, diversity, equity, space, natural laws, etc.), become the source of all goods. The more we share the richer we are. Knowledge is a good that multiplies when shared. The same with equity or justice or peace. Our personal happiness depends indeed on the wellbeing of the local community. This is something we have completely forgotten because we believe in our individualistic power which is an illusion. We all indeed depend on the qualities of our surroundings: peace, life, air, water, education, health are absolute necessary qualities and resources given by our milieu and we can't do without them; we can't provide these qualities and resources by ourselves either. We can't do anything by our own. We need each other. If we can't rely on the cooperation of others, we simply die.

Our individualistic power is an illusion because we tend to identify wrongly with two aspects of our person: our body and our mind. But these are only partial aspects of our person. We identify with them because they are clear components that are easy to identify and that are moving in space and time like a unity. Therefore we believe we are that!

Our body is the vehicle of our self that follows us everywhere we go. Where it is we are and where it is not we are not. It becomes then in our perception the image of what we are because the incarnation (it means the materialisation) of our being happens in one place at one precise time. On the other hand the envelop of our body marks the limits of the sensitive organs that are usually catching our sensations and we become soon aware that we feel what our senses

communicate to us but we do not feel what the senses of others communicate to them. There is evidently a clear distinction between me and you. But we fail to notice that this distinction is the material distinction between two material entities (my body and yours) and not the clear distinction between our two persons. How could I perceive this wider distinction between our two persons when it does not translate into material appearances?

Our mind is similarly also a mainly physical dimension of our being because it is narrowly related with our senses and our brain which constitute together the main means of perception we have. Yet this physical dimension leads us into further dimensions that are not purely physical such as perceiving, interpreting, thinking, reflecting, choosing. It is then a travel we do through time and space without necessarily moving our physical body. Our memory is an essential constituent of this mind which is, thanks to it, capable of identifying a form of continuity in our being because we can notice how many different experiences and events of the past can be related to our present conditions of life; we can then identify ourselves through time with an ego that seems to be real because it is contained in a body and it can act and demonstrate a form of continuity in its physical being. This continuity is perceived as coherence between causes and effects, with also a form of will that tends to support a project through which we believe we manage our life conditions. All these aspects are certainly real inasmuch as they are components of a further envelop that contains our small self we identify as our ego; this is an actor that has its own coherence and seems to form a closed entity.

The main question here is whether our true self is or is not identical with this ego entity. Our western culture is based on the conviction that it is and that we are all distinct beings like eggs in a basket: we

do not intersect; we do not have any dimension in common. We are free beings who act according to their perceptions and minds and who are capable of making choices. Our individual freedom is perceived in this way as our main ability to be independent and to act in a mobile and flexible way that depends only on our will and on the way we intend to adapt to, or transform, the conditions that are defined by our surroundings. The context is not depending on our will but our mind allows us to decide how we intend to relate to the given context: to adapt or change it. This apparent mastery of what we do is one of the main traits of our western culture which understands life as a mastery of our environment.

Yet when we examine further and deeper the nature of our relationships with the world, we notice that this pretended freedom is rather a fiction because so many other aspects make us a part of the world and not at all this free moving entity that seems to float on top of surrounding conditions.

- First we are born out of a chain of heredity that makes us the fruits of a long evolution. This evolution has started at the big bang and has created what we are. On that we have no influence. We are then just what this evolution has made us to be.
- We are also the product of our culture. We speak usually the language that is spoken where we were born. We have adopted the customs of the local culture, its beliefs, its knowledge, its skills, its way of looking at the world, its religion and spirituality.
- Life has been given to us free of charge. We got the body we have that is animated by an energy whose origin remains a mystery. It cannot just be only physical and chemical. There is a whole network of connections in our own bodies that makes life possible in such a subtle way that we can only marvel about it. The extreme complexity and ability of our physical bodies to

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react in a healthy way, to resist illnesses and to repair from wounds is an incredible faculty that does not depend on our personal freedom. It is given.

- Furthermore we develop an ability for resilience that strengthens our psychological being and provides it with amazing faculties to react to adversity and to propose creative attitudes of coping with events that could destroy us. In this way appears an incredible dimension of our being that is related more to immaterial phenomena than to material strength of our physical bodies.
- Not only is our vital energy a mystery but this further immaterial dimension of our being is a source of marvel. It is also strongly related to the presence of others and to their support or at least their teaching. We learn indeed from one another and we get our subtle energy from this form of solidarity that supports each of us.
- The unconscious is a powerful moving force that escapes our rationality or even our will. It is modulated by a collective culture and heritage. The unconscious is not only personal; it is mainly transpersonal and impacts on us as a collective or a community. Social bodies are moved as one body although they are made of different persons, as a physical body is made of differentiated organs. Emotions move us also as powerful energies that take their roots in local traditions and interrelationships.
- We breathe in and breathe out the air that our surrounding provides freely and at each instant. If we do not have access to this surrounding air we die immediately. Our physical environment provides us also with heat and humidity, with water which is the main component of our body and of life, with light also. It provides also beauty, surprise in the never ending marvel of the natural world, with a depth of the universe that puzzles our representations, with stars and the sun and the moon that rhythm our days and bring so many unknown perceptions that every day becomes the source of a new experience. Climate generates

processes that renew the fertility of our fields, the vitality of our forests, the liveliness of our rivers. It maintains the life of fauna and flora.

- Animals and plants bring also their contribution. Not only because we dare to eat them as food. They improve our environment and make life possible. The bees never stop pollinating and fertilizing the plants so that they produce their fruits. Many bugs act to defend our organism. Many species clean our environment, allowing natural cycles to develop and restoring wastes into resources.
- We are fed by our context. We eat what it produces. Certainly we have to cultivate the ground and to yield its fruits but our work is only a complement to a generosity that happens whether we are there or not. Nature provides also the timber and the stone we use to create a shelter. It gives us the sources of energy for fire, for cooking and heat.
- We live mainly of the goods that our fellow humans have provided. When I have eaten breakfast in the morning I have already consumed goods that come from so many different continents: I have eaten bread from the neighbour baker that he baked with some flour produced by more or less local farmers; I have drunken coffee from South America or cacao from Africa, fruits from any other country than mine, etc... Without these products that have been prepared by other people I would not live the life I do. These other people have also made the house in which I live, the chair on which I sit, the book I'm reading which is full of the knowledge humanity acquired through millennia of experience, research and reflection and especially through millennia of free and generous transmission.
- We do not need to mention here the way we go to school or to university or to the professional school and learn to read, to write, to develop skills, to be fascinated by beauty and wisdom. Without

the generosity of the elders of our society or tribe this would not be possible. Themselves they received what they deliver to us as a heritage that has also been received by them.

- This description can go on for ever because our links of interdependency with our environment and fellow humans are infinite.

We may wonder in a context of such a narrow interdependency how our western culture has been able to develop a concept of individualistic action and how it can stipulate that this isolated form of action in competition and conflict with others may bring happiness. We can therefore formulate the terms of this fundamental choice concerning the relationships between individualism and social solidarity as follows: What is the best way for me?

- 1) Should I concentrate on my personal interests and should I perceive them as being in conflict with the interests of others, and therefore should I engage in a form of competition that, I hope, will make of me a winner despite the fact that there are so many competitors and so few objective chances (probability) for me to overtake them?
- 2) Or should I believe that on the contrary my happiness and wellbeing depend on the wealth and harmony we can foster and share on the collective local or regional level, depending in the way we are all able to share one with another and care for each other in a spirit of equality and respect?

This is what I intend to examine now.

2a) Individualistic competition as a war

Competition as an art of excellence and domination of the one over the many creates the illusion of the small self and destroys the gift.

When we choose to practise competition we do that because we are not aware of the many links that connect each of us with our context and our fellow humans as it has been just illustrated above. We see the world as a field of penury and we haste to get what we want before the others do.

The rule of competition can be formulated in the following way: there is not enough for all and I have to run faster than the others to try to get what I need before they get to it. There are many problems in this assumption.

First there is the idea that there is not enough for all. This false assumption ensues out of the common experience that there is inequality and that the poor do not get what they need because other richer people have accumulated more than they can consume or use. The origin of what we perceive as penury is not scarcity but inequality that prevents free access to goods for all. The restricted conditions for access are the problem and not the quantity of available goods. Penury is rarely generated by the poverty or bareness of a given environment but, in most cases in our western society, it is generated by an unjust social system. In the case of a market society, everything has to be paid for and money is the only means that allows getting what one needs. And money is unequally shared. The penury of money is then the principal cause of all other forms of penury. On top of this artificial cause of penury the price on the market fluctuates also according to abundance. When a quantity of goods is kept reduced the price increases. It is even sometimes advantageous for the seller to destroy part of the goods of an

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abundant production in order to keep the price high for the remaining quantity. Penury is more often than we think created by artificial means: money, price, market, retention, speculation, etc. rather than by a lack of the necessary items.

On the other hand desires generate consumption to the limits of what can be provided. Need, or more exactly greed, increases and exhausts what is available. Mimetic needs tend to concentrate on similar or even identic items although needs are by essence very diversified among people. Fashion, advertisement, imitation, social comparison tend altogether to generate competition in the acquisition of the same kinds of items, although there is no special reason why different people should desire the same thing.

Competition reduces my chances to get what I want. If the number of items is truly limited, if the concentration of desires focuses on these same items by mimetic behaviour, if the means of acquisition is reserved for a few privileged ones who have abundant access to cash, the average chance of each one to get what they want is very limited. Access by one in this way excludes access by the other. Acquisition is indeed based on purposeless property rather than on purposeful access for use. Competition becomes therefore much sharper when there is only one race and so few possible rewards. If I am alone to compete against 8 billion people my chances of success are very limited. On the contrary, if we cooperate we have more chances to organise how we may in common share the use of the same items.

Consumption is a very narrow path for any access to goods when there is only one path to access them which is through market and its corollary which is through money. This access through market defines already by itself the nature of competitive access, whatever the community may do to help its members. Privilege is the key. If I

have money and can buy what I want, I'm in favoured position in the race of competition. I will of course have the tendency to defend a position that provides my privilege. I'll be then a supporter of the competitive system.

When I become a major actor in this system of competition I start to believe I am an important self. My ego is reinforced as an illusion of what I am, although this ego is only the shell that tries to give me a bodily coherence in order to protect me from dissolution. The process will lead me to believe I am this body and this mind as I have described it earlier. This fragile ego needs also to create an image in order to demonstrate how it is real. Acquisition and social status help to create the fiction of my persona and the social prestige attached to it, based on material appearances. The competition for the best possible place on the social ladder increases this need for feeling superior or better than the other in order to better hide my flaws.

Individualism is mainly based on this illusory identification with our body-mind. We believe that we are free entities which can orient themselves as they want. We believe in personal freedom as the limitless possibility to do what pleases us, as if we were autonomous bodies in space that can choose their path at their own will, despite all existing laws that link us with the wider context, such as gravitation, inertia, etc.. As we have seen earlier this autonomy is an illusion because all the varied forms of dependence on our milieu to survive and thrive. Individualism has yet developed, to the extreme, our belief to be free and freedom has taken in this way the significance of an unlimited and unrestricted ability to do what we decide to do even at the expense of any minimal adaptation to the constraints dictated by natural laws. True freedom is indeed not defined – as we believe too often - by the range of possibilities among which we can choose, but by our psychological and spiritual

ability to recognise what is truth and to conform to it. This is in fact true freedom to be able to recognise the truth of our own situation and to adapt to it. The opposed illusory understanding of freedom that does not recognise limitations is indeed by contrast a form of denial of what is and therefore a choice to live in a self-made fiction that we try to maintain as well as we can, against all evidence. This is the deep contradiction of the present way we envisage freedom: the more we create this fiction that lets us believe we can choose whatever we want for our personal gain, according to our illusory or at least very limited perceptions, the more we choose also to discard, in the name of the same illusory freedom, our reference to traditional wisdom. We feel – and our modern society works hard to let us believe it through fashion and advertisement – that we do not need to refer to what our ancestors have discovered along the centuries and we imagine that we are free to reinterpret wisdom teaching. The more we want to be free in the sense of doing what suits us, the more we have to take distance with the heritage of wisdom of our humanity such as philosophy and religion has delivered it to us. By this heritage I do not mean what the institution of the Church, the Mosque or the Temple, or even of the Academy, has delivered but what our ancestors have truly learned in their own personal depth through their own experience in relationship with the sacred and mysterious dimensions of life. This double movement of denial (increase individual mobility or range of choices and increased contempt for tradition teaching) leads us onto a path that denies two essential dimensions of our belonging to a human species that is part of nature: the natural laws and the human heritage. Instead of forming a wider body of diversified cells (the persons) that are interdependent but yet each one responsible for the way they behave or adapt to the existing links or create new deeper ones, this body of humanity tends to explode in many particles that lose their cohesion and relationships of one with another. Although it is hardly visible in concrete facts, this

explosion is so powerful that the world of our modern society seems to be transformed into a flat landscape where everything is of approximately equal value and which does not present any scale of hierarchy or laws of priority that would propose some values as of major importance in relation to others. The flat landscape is strongly influenced by the extreme simplification by the market where the price becomes the single measure and reference for choice. When diversity and complementarity diminish, competition increases.

This is a typical trend of capitalism which is fostering more and more the mentality of our culture. It is based on competition - that arises from the flattening of diversity - because the search for profit on which it is based generates rivalry. As we have seen earlier, amazingly it is not competition that fosters profit but it is the greed for profit that turns a system of production into a machine of overproduction that generates competition and prevents a fair income for all (because of competition) and condemns all to the laws of competition even when they have indeed no need for personal purposes to be in the race. On the contrary when there is local abundance and no overproduction, all needs can be satisfied and prices may remain high enough to provide fair means of subsistence to their producers.

Competition is often described as the best means to create excellence. This form of concourse is then of different nature and does not need to compete on the market. It can just be by means of comparison of what is the best product in terms of quality or creativity. Excellence is not an economic component but a qualitative aspect; at equivalent costs, quality is a gift. It does not need to be sold as an additive quality because it is globally embedded in the item as a result of the process that gave it a shape and it cannot be separated from it as a distinct dimension.

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Once the costs of material and production (infrastructure, work, investment) have been covered, an item becomes a gift: gift of inherited knowledge, gift of cumulated cooperation of the different stages of elaboration, gift of creativity and ingenuity.

Competition and market laws transform each good into an item that can be bought or sold without distinction of what it is: it can be an object, or work, or natural resources or even a natural quality that belongs to everybody as beauty or peace or silence. Competition requires for everything to be reduced to one only yardstick, i.e. money. The price is then the only measure that can measure all things. What cannot be measured by this yardstick has no value. And no valued exchanges are meant to be possible without using this yardstick and only this one. All other means are rejected or disvalued.

According to the logic of market life itself has lost its meaning and its value, because it has no price. Everything that has no price cannot be valued: the gift that is in each thing is lost and people forget that this gift is indeed the core of everything: the core of wonder.

2b) Cooperation as the next step of evolution

Cooperation multiplies the gifts and skills and makes them available for all. Life becomes the principal wealth to be shared.

I have described so far how much we are interdependent and how we yet believe that we can overrun the others in order to get what we want in a game of competition. This is roughly how we experience the dilemma between competition and cooperation because nothing in our present culture helps us to discover how to be part of a larger

body of humanity. We mainly perceive this constraint as a very restrictive requirement and we do not see the potential it has.

Traditional societies have always tent to keep an important part of their wealth as part of the commons, i.e. of the resources that are not owned by anyone but remain accessible to all. They did not do that out of idealism or wisdom, although wisdom was certainly not excluded out of this choice, but they chose to do so because it was the best way to ensure subsistence for all in a context that was often exposed to scarcity and fragility. It seems there is a natural law of necessity that tends to ensure that the commons provide most necessary resources when conditions for survival are tough. When we observe the two patterns either of property or of access to use, we see how they contrast. The trend to protect private property seems to accompany wealth and accumulation while the trend to develop good conditions of access to use of common property seems to be the characteristic of societies that are confronted with insecurity of resources and fragility of their environment. As I have shown earlier, property seems to deprive everybody who does not own while free access makes everything available for everybody who can access these resources.

We can notice how more egalitarian societies provide more wellbeing for more people while unequal societies are impregnated by forces of resentment and violence. Statistically it is proven that more egalitarian societies enjoy lesser degree of violence, fewer people in prison, better access to education and health, and finally better spirit of cooperation. It is clear in these cases how the wellbeing of the community is the true source of personal wellbeing. The law of competition is here reversed: the more I participate in the wellbeing of my local or regional community, the more I will enjoy personal wellbeing. If I serve my community, and if we all do, it will provide

better services. The commons will increase in quantity and quality and potential and be accessible for much more many people. Not only the general level of education, health, knowledge will increase, but the way people cooperate will generate also more personal relationships between members of the community. These relationships becoming more personal, the degree of care for one another and the respect for the diversity of people should also increase.

But, more fundamental for our own evolution than the degree of abundance of what the community may provide to each of its members, the building up of the community represents also a fundamental qualitative quantum leap. Beyond the cooperation of isolated persons (the individuals or particles) a wider form of body takes shape.

Teilhard de Chardin describes this stage of evolution in the most interesting terms. He affirms that the formation of a wider body of human community represents the further stage of our collective evolution. The evolution of the universe has produced a wide range of diversity, from the rocks to the plants and the animals as well as the fostering of human beings we consider as the top of the ladder, which is not so evident especially when one consider that no species is truly distinct from the others as we all are only parts of a whole that sustains us. Nevertheless Teilhard de Chardin affirms that the next step of this evolution consists for mankind in forming a wider body of unity between human persons. This idea seems a bit frightening if one considers this unity as a melting pot of our diversity into a single monolithic whole. But it is precisely what it is not. This unity is on the contrary grounded on diversity. When we unite together each of us brings their own personality and specificity to the wider body. It is not a fusion but on the contrary a

diversification and a personalisation that takes place. The unity is therefore possible only if we accept, each of us, to be radically ourselves, of course in a real spirit of complementarity and not in a spirit of opposition by contrast. The wider body needs our own originality. It is composed as a human body of different parts or organs that play each one a different role. Each one is unique and irreplaceable. Unity relies on this distinction and personalisation. And each one of us has therefore to find their own essence in order to better contribute to the whole body. Personification becomes in this way the path for integration.

The commons are an important step of this evolution as they constitute the first stage of this progress of integration. First we need to accept to share and to care for one another. Then we need to keep in common our principal resources and to protect the commons from any negative impact or greedy appropriation. We have also to nourish these commons with the best we have in terms of skills, of knowledge, of wisdom, but also of material resources. The commons are by essence very fragile, not in their own nature but because they are accessible to all and therefore can be badly exploited or destroyed or diverted by ignorance or mischievous intention.

It becomes in this way evident that the availability of the commons for all can only be protected if the whole community agrees that it is a primordial condition for its wellbeing and for implementing the social quality that it intends to. This agreement means a form of consensus between the members. This consensus is only possible at the price of a relative compromise each member has to accept in order to find common ground despite of the diversity of the members. At first glance this compromise seems to be an important restriction of personal freedom but it is on the contrary the opposite: the acceptance of the consensus creates conditions that will prevent

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exterior agents from taking control of what happens locally. It means in other words that everything members cannot agree upon will be controlled by exterior actors. The choice is then: shall we find a relative compromise and organise the necessary conditions for the thriving of true solidarity and cooperation or shall we defend our individual illusory pieces of freedom but accept, as a price for this illusion, to see exterior actors control our daily life? When the partial compromises remain insignificant and the global gain can therefore become major, there is no hesitation to go the harsher path, and then the reward is inestimable. We reach then the beginning of the path on the untraveled road of our further evolution. We need to follow it in order to know to which true wealth it will lead us.

3) The relational choice: money or friendship?

Money has replaced kinship (relationships); human relationships are ejected from everyday life and replaced by money exchanges.

The third fundamental choice - which is subsidiary to the precedent choice between competition and cooperation, and makes sense only if this other second choice has been made - concerns our relationships. At first glance the affirmation, here above, that money has replaced kinship or relationships seems to make no sense or to be the expression of a violent and indistinct criticism. This is indeed a quotation of the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. He says with these words that market forces have completely transformed our human relationships; these relationships are originally based on exchanges that help us to intensify our connectedness and the human character of our connexion, but money, on the opposite, tends to replace this human aspect of our exchanges by the single transfer of a quantity of cash that tends to put an end to the exchange inasmuch as it constitutes the final compensation that does not expect any further

development. We are in this way deprived of truly human relationships which rely rather on the reciprocal giving of what we are.

The terms of the choice can be formulated as follows:

- 1) Is money truly the yardstick that allows measuring and compensating for all our exchanges and does its use help us to develop the depth of our common humanity?
- 2) Or do we need to replace the generalised use of money as unique form of compensation by more subtle means in order to better stimulate relationships because they rely on much more than just the exchange of goods against cash?

3a) Market and money regulate nowadays our exchanges

When money compensates for what we offer to our community, we get deprived of what matters: generosity, care and recognition.

Most exchanges in traditional societies are not measured and compensated for by money. Without the use of money, which is rare in traditional societies, they are directly an exchange of services or goods that expect further developments because they are never fully compensated for and need therefore a further exchange to be brought into better equilibrium because the beneficiary of the exchange is in principle meant to give back what he or she has received and the cycle of exchanges in this way never can be exhausted. Each exchange always needs an addition to find a better balance which is never provided and therefore requires ever further extensions. This incompleteness of exchanges means that they have to develop without end and to intensify in order to offer more exchanges that offer the opportunities for deeper human relationships. As the

exchanges are not compensated for by money, which consists in an anonymous amount of cash, but by human contributions in terms of work or goods, they are in general made alive by a major expression of humanity, translated in the form of generosity, of creativity, of attention or simply of considerate care.

The reverse process generated by the use of money tends by contrast to make relationships poorer and poorer. When money exchanges prevail they deprive each actor of this intensification in humanity and make each one poorer, although each of the actors has probably got more money out of this shortened cycle where money seems to put an end to each exchange. It is how money is said to replace relationships. I described this process earlier as a process of expulsion. Money ejects us and our humanity out of economic exchanges which concern more and more the material dimension, at the expense of the human dimension of our relationships.

We believe that we live in a society that provides everything we need: food at the shopping centre, health at the hospital, culture on the radio or at the school, leisure at the cinema, sport at the club, friendship at the pub. Because our market system has invaded every corner of our life, we are provided for many things by many performing services which seem to answer all our needs and which are all paid for. These goods can all be consumed, either because we pay for the price (shopping, trades) or because the State has paid for them through further investments that are financed by taxes (roads, health, education). We live in a well regulated society and our needs are answered by a system of consumption that believes it has thoroughly foreseen each of them, or at least defined what was essential and what it would provide, and what it wouldn't. By conquering all forms of relationships and creativity, market and technology have forced us out of the network of natural exchanges

that could develop without using channels regulated by money (i.e. rather by reciprocity as described above). Not only kinship and friendship become irrelevant because they do not answer any more needs connected with subsistence, not only the question of meaning becomes irrelevant because all solutions are already provided on a more functional level, but on top of this we have been more drastically ejected out of our own society that seems to function well without our contribution (except as cogs), it means without our human creativity, empathy, generosity or search for the essence of life. We are no more needed as soon as we have paid or been paid for what we needed (i.e. bought) or provided (i.e. sold).

3b) Friendship and community as the fosters of relationships

When care and concern become the core of our relationships, we can thrive in diversity and offer, or be seen for, what we truly are.

On the opposite of this impoverishment generated by the general use of money as the unique means to measure and compensate for exchanges, I believe that a lively society needs to be based on real subsistence (basic material and immaterial needs), on true search for the meaning of life, on real needs defined and related to this deeper meaning and mystery about what life truly is, on care for each other where all members are offered special possibilities to thrive, on harmonious integration into a wider universe and social group in a form of interdependence where each one is unique and needed for what they are in their originality. Individuals can then become persons who interact with one another. Relationships take shape in a natural and free way, related with subsistence and true needs (immaterial and material). They are not pre-defined by market forces or technological worship. They are the core of what happens between people. They are the creative forces that generate true

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communication. People are no more ejected from society. Relationships are the true vectors that shape community. For these conditions to be real we need to be connected with the needs of subsistence and we need to escape the laws of market and technology (i.e. we need to control them by social awareness).

Money (replacing kinship), technology (replacing meaning), individualism (replacing sense of belonging) are the tools of our own ejection from life and social interdependency that form indeed, I believe, the core of our experience in life. When we reverse this movement of expulsion and try to reintegrate our real place into a network of interdependent relationships, we have the opportunity to rediscover the true meaning of friendship. As long as we do not reverse this tendency, friendship will remain a leisure activity. We will enjoy good time together having a glass of wine, a delicious meal, a BBQ, a swim, a ride, a dance or watch a show, listen to a concert. But none of these activities will provide the opportunity to be truly concerned with or involved in each other's life.

During these usually good times of leisure that we share together we are of course able to exchange about what we have experienced or what we have done, how we have felt and what we intend to do. But this sharing goes only through talk and nothing is there to test or confront the truth of it. I do not mean that the one who talks is lying. I mean that there is indeed no direct confrontation with any form of reality that would test the truth of it. When I write these present lines, they are only words. They ensue of course out of my experience and my observations of what happens in me and around me. They are honest words because I am truly trying to discover what is true about them. The present critical expression of what I observe is indeed generated by my frustration in front of what I have called expulsion, and how we seem to be prevented from developing true relationships

of friendship by the market system and technological way of thinking that impregnate and even define our culture and ways of living. Yet nothing confronts me with the test of veracity of my talk or writing. In this way of life, which is detached from concrete needs, there is no direct confrontation with the true nature of reality, and these lines are only words that I type on my computer and that are not confronted with the hard struggle of life in its materiality. By contrast committed friendship is precisely what would allow to confront the truth (or untruth) of these words with the visible and invisible matter of life.

Friendship in this way means interaction and involvement of each one in the life of the other. Involvement should be here understood in a positive way as expression of a deep concern for what the other experiences and how s/he does that. Involvement does not mean intrusion or invasion. Privacy remains what each one wishes it to be, at the degree one wishes it to be. In these terms more concern means more understanding, better listening, more empathy and also, inevitably, a wish to participate where there is room for participation. Friendship means in this way deeper sharing and involvement because there is something to share through life experience. If I'm involved with you in a building job, I will know you better than if I spend only time with you around a table, drinking and eating and talking. If you visit me when I'm sick, you will discover aspects of my person, of my fragility, you would never know without me being sick. Accompanying people in terminal illness is certainly a very powerful way to connect deeply on a level that touches the essence of life itself. Yet, without looking for such extreme situations, we notice how a practical involvement in one another's life creates the spark that produces the real light.

We are all highly diversified people and we are complementary in our experiences, skills, knowledge, choices of ways of living,

priorities that ensue out of past experiences, insights, steps of transformation of ourselves that result from these diverse conditions offered by our own life. As we develop very different skills, due to these personal specific conditions, we become more competent in specific fields that our friends ignore. This is, I believe, the core of community. We are all as the diversified cells or organs of a body which need each other because the hand needs the foot, and the heart needs the lungs and the brain (the image is not from me!). Each of these parts is poor and ineffective in itself, but reveals itself to be powerful and rich when linked with others.

We all need each other to progress in life. We need, you and me – I believe - to talk and to share about our main concerns and questions, about our own doubts and insecurities, about our suffering, about our intuitions, our wisdom. Each of us, we need the support of the others to develop into someone more mature, more aware of what is, more conscious of the wider picture. Alone we struggle; we probably feel free and unimpaired or undisturbed by others, but we feel yet also very poor because we are cut off from other's intuitions, insights, knowledge and abilities to live in a compassionate way.

Community is based on the search for truth and for the best ways to make people happy. Before we become the takers we are (probably an attitude inherited from our market system), we are mainly givers (our true nature). Generosity is the deep energy of life that needs to make available what flows naturally. Each of us we need to be seen and recognised for what we are, and the best way to be recognised is to become givers. The more generous we are, the richer we become. This is for me one of the mysteries of life.

Friends have skills we do not have. Why don't we trust them to lead us where we cannot go alone. This is not a resignation of being

absorbed in the anonymity of the flock. This is not the melting down of diverse personalities into a homogenous mass. No, it is precisely the contrary, becoming more ourselves in order to be unique and provide what we can to the others, and receive from them when we need to. Personalisation is the path, as I have described it earlier, and it calls us to become agents of service for one another. To lead and to be lead is probably the cement that keeps community together and links us into lively relationships of true friendship that foster life and wonder.

Why do we have so much difficulty to be committed to a common purpose? Why are we so deeply split one from another? Why are we so much obsessed by our own personal needs? Why is individualism, and not community, our main identification?

Why conform to the laws of market and technology that deprive us from our being? and why not try to become helpers to each other, and guides and inspirations in order to create new relationships that bring each of us in deeper connexion with the mystery which we are, you and me? The whole is much more than the sum of the parts.

4) The technological choice: which technical means?

In our modern world technology has replaced meaning; solutions are chosen for technical reasons and the meaning of life gets lost.

This further choice is also subsidiary to the second choice between competition and cooperation and is on the same level as the precedent choice for reducing money use in exchanges. It is parallel to it. This quotation is from the sociologist Ivan Illich. It says that our modern society does not question the motivation or the aim but just adapts technical solutions to the current trend. It does not ask what should be

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done or solved or what is the meaning of what is attempted but it just propose practical solutions in the continuity of what has been done before. It means that we are happy repairing what is without asking whether it makes sense. And we do not search for deeper meaning in order to find inspiration for our decisions. The solution follows mechanically the problem.

The terms of the choice can be formulated as follows:

- 1) Is it enough to find technical solutions on the short term for all challenges we have to meet?
- 2) Or is it preferable to redefine the purpose and the meaning of what has to be done, in relation with our understanding of the meaning of life and of what the priorities should be for the concerned community?

4a) Technology as a readymade solution for everything

Technology calls for more technology; problems are solved on the technical level when we do not know any other approach anymore.

6) TEN COMMITMENTS FOR DAILY LIFE

In order to find a better harmony in our relationship with femininity, 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 reconciliation with femininity

To allow reconciliation between femininity and masculinity we should conform in our daily life to the following 10 commitments.

1) S

List of options

LIST OF OPTIONS (TITLES AND SHORT WORDINGS)

An essay in seven volumes 2

CHANGE AS A SEARCH FOR TRUTH

1) THE GENDER EXPERIENCE

Two natures – two experiences 12

The gender paradox: biological or social 12

In our social construct we have forgotten that it is gender itself that fosters genetically a fundamental difference of life experience. 12

Two contrasting experiences 13

Pregnancy teaches women the introverted attention for care while the male partner develops extroverted skills as provider of structure. 13

Yin and Yang 14

Feminine and masculine qualities are complementary to one another and they combine in infinite ways that always mingle. 14

Yin or feminine qualities 15

Motherhood is the expression of Yin that encompasses feminine qualities, providing life, gentleness, care and understanding. 15

Yang or masculine qualities 16

Fatherhood is the expression of Yang that encompasses masculine qualities, providing structure, strength, leadership and expression. 16

Yin and Yang archetypes 17

Yin and Yang qualities rarely exist as such; they are poles of attraction of our behaviour or archetypes that impregnate our lives. 17

Poles and combinations 18

Yin and Yang are never pure; they appear always in combinations with their antagonistic feature. It is how equilibrium may arise. 18

Aptitudes and attitudes 19

Yang is rather shown in aptitudes (skills or abilities to act) while Yin is rather shown in attitudes (ways of being or understanding). 19

Competition, dominance and cooperation 21

The threat of the power of giving birth 21

The feminine power of giving birth is perceived by masculinity as subversive because it creates life and develops in a hidden place. 21

Strength and resilience 22

Masculinity is linked with strength and control of external conditions. It dominates resilience (Yin) that is an inner hidden force. 22

Control and dominance vs life and subversion 23

Sense of exclusion, fear of the subversive power of life and dominance translate the need of masculinity to control femininity. 23

Mary and John the Baptist 23

Femininity means understanding, i.e. deepening of the meaning of life; masculinity means expression, i.e. acting out of this mystery. 23

The myth of the Garden of Eden 25

Two ways: either stealing the fruit, or following the path of our own growth, that allows in us the marriage of feminine and masculine. 25

Dominant and recessive 28

By analogy with biology, masculinity may be said to be a dominant character and feminine a recessive one. Yet they are both essential. 28

Control, oppression and protection 29

The antinomy between Yin and Yang opens five different ways: control, exploitation, repression, self-restraint or cultivation. 29

Abortion of the feminine 32

Paradoxically a major characteristic of our modern society is that we give priority to Yang dominant values over Yin recessive ones. 32

2) YANG DOMINATING OVER YIN

Gender roles 35

Roles according to genders 35

Privileges, power and preferences participate to define social roles, based on gender identities, between conformism and exclusion.	35	4) Loss of humanity	57
Women's liberation movement	38	The domination of other races and cultures imposes an artificial hierarchy between peoples that distorts our common humanity.	57
Women's liberation has broken open a vicious circle of false representations / situations of oppression. It has empowered us all.	38	5) Loss of being	60
Gender specialisation	39	The exclusive focus on material production and profit has destroyed our ability to experience how life consists in just being.	60
In traditional societies social roles are defined according to gender but this does not create a hierarchy of value between people.	39	6) Loss of community	62
The unisex issue	41	Exploitation imposes the law of individualism and destroys our sense of belonging to, and caring freely for, a wider community.	62
Our trade system has uniformed our ways of being, disconnecting them from our own personality which is linked with our gender.	41	7) Loss of empowerment	65
Masculinisation through history	42	The globalisation of market has generated an anonymous economic system that focuses on things and makes people locally powerless.	65
7 stages of masculinisation	42	3) THE PATH OF LIBERATION	
Our human history and evolution is characterised by a constant development by stages of the domination of Yang over Yin values.	42	A way out of domination and expulsion	69
Western domination and racism	47	The boomerang effect	69
The conquest of southern countries by western nations has imposed itself in the name of a pretended cultural and racial superiority.	47	Our western society has developed a powerful capacity to dominate but domination does not act only on the other: it fires back.	69
Imposing "universal" patterns	49	Expulsion	71
Colonial, imperial and trade oriented expansion of western forms of development has been imposed as if these were universal values.	49	The global market has destroyed our local ability to relate in a personal way for matters that concern our daily subsistence.	71
Domination as destruction of life	51	Discovering the dimension of community	74
Domination (exploitation of nature, repression of femininity, rejection of spirituality) leads to destruction of life and of relationships.	51	Community, the next step of our evolution, will propose new forms of human relationships based on land, belonging and consensus.	74
1) Loss of the book of teaching	52	The indestructible energy of Life	76
Domination over nature prevents us from listening to its generous teaching about the essence of life and from adapting to its laws.	52	Materialism can repress the expression of Life but Life can never be destroyed. It remains the energy that will bring us back to Life.	76
2) Loss of mythical thinking	54	A need for a new anthropology	77
Domination of rationality prevents us from being receptive to the unfathomable truth expressed by symbolical or mythical teaching.	54	The path of liberation	77
3) Loss of sacredness	55	The deep change of mentality (mind revolution) is: what was despised (Yin) becomes the leading value to be implemented (Yang).	77
Domination of scientific thinking generates an illusion of being all-powerful, at the expense of a search for the sacred mystery.	55	True debate	78

List of options

Secularism is radical censorship; it prevents us from sharing our deepest values to define the priorities of a common social project.	78	Our mind never stops giving birth to new thoughts or bites of knowledge. We need to question and free ourselves from these thoughts.	100
Diversity of identities	80	Process and result	102
Colonised cultures need to recover their own identity and dismantle the image of contempt western nations have projected onto them.	80	Western linear cultures tend to focus on the product (result); traditional circular cultures care for the quality of the process.	102
The image of the other	82	Institution and intuition	104
We tend to describe the “Other” in ways that justify our fears and intentions, and explain our difficult relationship with him/her.	82	Institutions structure our lives but the true source of life remains in the intuitions that animate the structure, from emptiness to form.	104
Violence and decolonisation	84	Reconnecting with nature as a Source / Teacher	106
Violence (not necessarily physical) has to be understood (not justified) as a means to become free of imposed identity projections.	84	A great liberation: stop considering Nature as a heap of resources (Yang) but see Her as the great Source that feeds/teaches us (Yin).	106
4) COMPLEMENTARITY AS A RETURN TO LIFE		The true purpose of economics	108
The marriage of the feminine and the masculine	88	Instead of generating growth and profit for a few, economics have to satisfy basic needs and provide good life conditions for all.	108
Perception and expression	88	The pre-eminence of social options	110
Any form of expression needs to be rooted in awareness of the deeper meaning of life: a sacred private space that needs protection.	88	To take control of its own destiny, a social group has to define the basic rules that preserve the right conditions and safeguard them.	110
Nurturing and structuring	91	5) THE FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE	
Rooted in the ground of being the seed needs to be first nurtured; it then needs a supporting structure, between emptiness and form.	91	The great simplification	114
Emptiness and form	93	1) The economic choice: profit or care?	114
Form reveals and also hides the deep meaning of Emptiness, which reveals the content of form that has to dissolve. Both are essential.	93	Economics can be seen as the dominant and leading energy in our lives or as the tool to be mastered in the service / for the good of all.	114
Innocence and knowledge	96	1a) Free market: overproduction and destruction	115
Our western society has taught us to believe in knowledge. Despite its creativity knowledge dissolves innocence. Both are necessary.	96	A general thirst for profit generates overproduction that is the cause of more competition and destruction of our living conditions.	115
Focus and attention	98	1b) Economics in the service of solidarity	119
As we have learned mainly to solve single problems our mind focusses on details and loses its ability for attention to the whole.	98	When we share wealth and care for the wellbeing of each one all members of the community thrive and the total wealth is greater.	119
A new strategy	100	2) The community choice: me or the others?	122
The systematic questioning of our thoughts	100	Individualism can be seen as the law that serves my own interest or as the hindrance to true shared wealth based on interdependency.	122

2a) Individualistic competition as a war	125	
Competition as an art of excellence and domination of the one over the many creates the illusion of the small self and destroys the gift.	125	
2b) Cooperation as the next step of evolution	128	
Cooperation multiplies the gifts and skills and makes them available for all. Life becomes the principal wealth to be shared.	128	
3) The relational choice: money or friendship?	130	
Money has replaced kinship (relationships); human relationships are ejected from everyday life and replaced by money exchanges.	130	
3a) Market and money regulate nowadays our exchanges	130	
When money compensates for what we offer to our community, we get deprived of what matters: generosity, care and recognition.	130	
3b) Friendship and community as the fosters of relationships	131	
When care and concern become the core of our relationships, we can thrive in diversity and offer, or be seen for, what we truly are.	131	
4) The technological choice: which technical means?	133	
In our modern world technology has replaced meaning; solutions are chosen for technical reasons and the meaning of life gets lost.	133	
4a) Technology as a readymade solution for everything	134	
Technology calls for more technology; problems are solved on the technical level when we do not know any other approach anymore.	134	
6) TEN COMMITMENTS FOR DAILY LIFE		135
10 commitments for reconciliation with femininity	135	
To allow reconciliation between femininity and masculinity we should conform in our daily life to the following 10 commitments.	135	