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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 explains in each volume the orientation.

- 0) Community and self-limitation:
starting a move towards change.**
- 1) Effort and comfort:
towards a reconciliation between nature and humanity
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
- 5) Knowledge and learning: towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect
- 6) Spirit and matter: towards a reconciliation between Reality and appearances.

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

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

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

The risk of generalisations

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

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

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

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

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

A testimony

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Statements, patterns and options

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The power of truth

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

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

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1) THE GENDER EXPERIENCE

Since the origin of time, gender has been the principal characteristic 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 principally a social component, which is 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 to start our reflexion on gender issues by trying to go back to the root of the difference: 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 how the differences between genders are impacting on the way we build our social relationships. Social relationships are shaped principally by our representations how each gender does or should experience life. Different societies 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 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 is originally. 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 huge 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. This does not mean that all our experiences are different but it means that this organic difference is the root of the issue. 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*.

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 experiences and therefore different perceptions of life that generate further different attitudes, before the social construct consolidates these differences or exploits them. This will be our starting point: 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 safety.

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 opposite men feel excluded from 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 protection 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 found 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 founds 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 that takes shape and a contribution to the global common experience.

This form of specialisation that arises out of biological differences will nevertheless extend beyond the birth and 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 we are all, more or less, free to shape our lives, by identifying with the pattern or by taking more liberty with its modelling power. Yet,

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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. 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 qualities and skills. The contrast is never absolute, it is never so sharp: we all have also many tendencies to develop our own skills and also complementary skills but yet in different proportions,

given our gender and our personality; whether female or male, we are always a bit of both. It means that the male, although principally male, will also develop some feminine qualities while the female, although principally female, will also develop some masculine qualities. The quality or proportion of feminine and masculine qualities varies very much from one person to the next. It happens even often that men can 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. 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 ternary equation, i.e. with three factors: the yin, the Yang and the right balance between both. This is a dynamic movement that never stop 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.

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 or 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 first child is different from the one for the last born. And each woman is free to reinterpret the role she wants 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. 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

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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 type 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.

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 with which he is not in direct touch. 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 goods and means that contribute to shape the right environment. He has to create the structure that will ensure the minimum comfort 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. 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 archetypical level, the creativity of men contrasts with 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 roles to women and men. 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 completely disconnected from gender. It is indeed striking how much the qualities I have described as feminine or masculine are in fact not absolutely linked with gender, even if they originated out of difference experiences that are narrowly related with gender. After arising they become 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 indeed 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!

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.

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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 act 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 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 minutes 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 of opposite attractions (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-digested 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
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.

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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 opposite 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.

We will see later how 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 the two components which 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 also 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 phenomenon - whether by women or by men - is more focused on the exterior appearances than on the real interior hidden reality of what happens 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 any social organisation tries 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 - 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 afraid of what arises in a hidden place. Fairy tales are full of stories where children (it 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 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? 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

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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 femininity develops 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 (strength) while women show more inner resistance (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 dominates 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 which 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 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.

St 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 Christian tradition proposes in the persons of St 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 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

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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. 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 told 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.

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.

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.

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:

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.

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- 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 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 opposite, the way of the shortcut is based on, an 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 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

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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 quiets 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 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.

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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 masculine tendencies in order to leave more space for feminine 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 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 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 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

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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 instead of 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 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 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

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

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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) POLARISATION OR COMPLEMENTARITY

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 opposite, 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.

Dominating masculinity or denial of differences

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, at the opposite, 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 shattered 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 that, once the barriers have been thrown down, 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 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 component; they have been reduced to a function. And this form of devaluation by impoverishment is very different from the other form

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of devaluation that happens according to a hierarchy of false prestige, based on exploitation, i.e. on the gender that dominantly practises these different jobs! It means that our diversity of personalities and skills gets lost into a uniform chain of production where skills are undifferentiated and gender does not play anymore a role because it becomes irrelevant as our personality or uniqueness does too. Yet it would be foolish to deny gender differences. It remains evident that women continue to give birth and that this very special experience fosters their abilities and attitudes about life. This has inevitably to play a fundamental role in the shaping of the personality, in the development of special personal gifts and skills, in the way one looks at the world, and finally in the choice of activity and the way to practise it.

What is essential is how to avoid that what we can call feminine activities should be taxed differently because they are practised more by women. Now, on the opposite, it is very rich that anybody can choose any possible job, independently of their gender. There is objectively no obstacle for a woman to drive a truck or for a man to work in child care. We have yet to remain aware that the unisex issue is created artificially by a modern world which has detached from nature because comfort, market and money have interfered and made poorer the diverse ways of expressing one's own personality and of pursuing one's own vocation. It means that this artificial 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!

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 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 new ways of thinking and 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 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 in more detail happened much later. It consisted in the Greek discovery of philosophical thinking (especially Aristotle) and its rational 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

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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 or as a tool that could observe the physical world and propose technics 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 as soon 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 in future 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 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. 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 at 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. 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. It is clear that domination could only be consolidated if there were no respect for these conquered cultures. 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 how

to use 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 accumulated 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, 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. This stage,

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based on overproduction, led the investors, supported by national governments and armies, to invade 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 image 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. Very often they were 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 to act under the spell of eternal growth on a limited planet. They look at any price 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 the wider free market (neo-liberalism) that is meant to profit the leaders of this system based on the maximisation of profit. The most recent extension 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 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 of respect and acceptance are overridden by masculine values 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 added to create a more complete and truer picture. Yet my intent is here 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 to arise. Efficiency has in itself 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. Later (in the 19th century) 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, despite 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. 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; 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

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in principle equal, although the difference of language, culture, customs and beliefs soon created such a contrast that the 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. The whole endeavour was lately justified as a vast project of civilisation for these so-called lower races. Churches offered even their support in the name of mission and proselytism. 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 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, as well as the traditional one, with 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

former imported one because it was mainly exploiting, the latter indigenous 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 than as a necessary physical factor.

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). 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 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 had no 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.

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, in violence that reigns on the international scene, mainly alimeted 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)l, etc. This so-called universal model

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

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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 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 - because it was 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. 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 the wider perception of life as being a deep mystery on so many different levels. It seemed at each easier to drop the old beliefs and replace them by more skills that trends 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 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 we have already described. Each stage in fact represents the same general tendency for 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

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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 was 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 learn 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 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 because they have been 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 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.

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, etc.
- Diversity: it generates more and more diversity and contrasts. Gullies become deeper, forests darker, 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 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 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 systematic system that

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became a sort of catechism. 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 paintings. Artistic expressions of this early time do 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

succeeded to put nevertheless mankind at the core of 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. 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 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 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 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 point of view but seems also to hide at the same time the wider 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 prevailed on the objective observation by science.

We have also 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

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harmony. On the opposite, 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!

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-centeredness in the context of belonging is just egoism but self-centeredness 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. 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

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 achieved. The technological superiority (ships, weapons) of the newcomers, combined with a total 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 where we make sure that we are rather near the top than the bottom, or at least not completely the last one of all. 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 classes 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 need a victim we can dominate. 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

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scapegoat⁷ to explain why our society is at war. It is very important, I believe, to recognise how much our social hierarchy is based 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 not, 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.

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 choice” to accept equality with indigenous people as they wanted to grab their land. The only way was to declare the non-existence of these people: the land was terra nullius or 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. But the act of colonisation was 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 expected, these indigenous people did not do what 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. guilty of breaking the law of 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.

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.

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

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 progress 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 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 of our 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 became the dominant leading measures 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.

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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 the penury of necessities that generates a contrast of wealth between the haves and the haves-not but it is on the contrary the (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 force over direct human concerns such as 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 inhibited 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 natural context. It would have been possible to use these new means for the well-being of all, in a spirit of solidarity. This was indeed a 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? It is the role of a society to keep its economic forces in check and, at the same time,

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*.

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: 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 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 has imposed 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 European nations in America, Africa, Asia or Australia were a clear expression of this trend to invade more land and exploit more resources and people. 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 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, while the Jacobin movement tries to establish a society of equality that would empower the whole population, i.e. simple workers and citizens too. 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

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conquered territories there is no democratic rule under the conquering power as it is understood in western context.

The invading power governs by decrees. It means decisions are taken by the administrative power in a completely subjective way, without reference to the civil laws that regulate social life in the mother country. This difference 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 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 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 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 immorality of 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 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 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. 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 for the most powerful. Yet, I believe, not only another alternative exists that allows community to thrive, and it means to care for this dimension if we want it to be fruitful, but I believe also that it would bring much more happiness to all of us, maybe with less stuff but at least with more joy.

We need now to rediscover what true community is. It 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.

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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 one 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 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.

In this last description the two opposed trends clearly appear where, 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 huge 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 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.

In my previous description of community I have described how the awareness of belonging and the attempt to forge a consensus in the local community were 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.

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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 to provide the necessary energy and is hardly supported by its 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 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 to buy these products 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 latter is properly the real cause of the former and the main motor for its development. 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 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.).

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 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 quality that is reduced to the minimum necessary yet to be sold. 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. 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. 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 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 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.

The tragedy is not only the deterioration of the local economy with its huge loss in skills and traditions, or 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 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

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encourages them to adapt in the name of the illusion to find more happiness when more goods become available.

The path of liberation

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 the people in the home country and the indigenous people in the overseas conquered territories. The former are governed by law, i.e. by a rule that is 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. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq has well illustrated this fact in the deep repercussions it had in Europe and the USA.

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 actor and transforms his perception of the situation: the situation he intends to master but also the way he looks at it and the nature of the interests he intends 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 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.

Evidently this evolution is not just the fruit of chance and necessity. It is also geared by very precise interests and intentions by people 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, as the ejected beings, as well as the main actors, as 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. 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 Mishra 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

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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.

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 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 exchanges 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 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 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 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 these people who have been disempowered 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

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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 and 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 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 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; 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 valorises each member and generates 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 endangers what is fragile and wants to live.

The indestructible energy of Life

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

This short description I made above of our past human evolution was done not to rewrite history in my own way but to show how much we have lost on our path of evolution, mainly not because of what we have discovered but rather because of what we have abandoned by neglect and lack of awareness.

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 Life from our daily experience or at least repelled it to the private sphere.

It is important to see that this attack 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.

The path of liberation

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

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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. 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 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 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 values 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 well-being. 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 values.

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 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

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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 philosophical or religious 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 in this way a serious obstacle for a true debate; it 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.

The debate for the search of a new anthropology means that we address all issues and that we dare to ask all possible questions. This is certainly the most difficult part of it: what are the main questions? The attempt to ask the right questions constitutes the core of the method. Consensus will not arise out of the questioning but questioning will allow finding a consensus in the fact the focus is the questioning. The search for truth becomes in this way the common effort. There is probably no simple answer and the answer seems to

move away inasmuch as it is addressed. But nevertheless some priorities take slowly shape, that are not final answers but only provisory stakes that mark the path. The effort for consensus consists rather indeed to agree about main principles or modalities that can be adopted for many diverse reasons. Consensus takes shape when the local community can agree about priorities more than about motivations. And consensus can only control what it is agreed upon. People know that anything they cannot agree upon will be probably controlled by other external actors in the own interest of these actors. This objective fact will certainly help each one to accept compromises in order to reinforce the inner cohesion of the local community, even if it is at the expense of letting go of minor issues.

In other words 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 of 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 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. 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.

In this way the path of liberation is the path that leads to diversification and personalisation, i.e. individuation, yet not in an individualist way, but in narrow relationship with the community as whole and a body that allows each one to be who they are. The new anthropology is based on human values and therefore allows each one to be seen and recognised and for the whole community to acquire a new profile as well, because, in allowing each one to be whom they are, it becomes richer and more complete. 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 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 to oppose 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.

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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 were exploited without restraint and in denial of the traditional customs of respect of nature. The whole traditional integration of social and natural exchanges into the natural cycles of reconstitution of resources and absorption of wastes was broken and environmental destruction left most of these countries in dreadful conditions, without mentioning the effect of agricultural production and natural resources extraction aimed at exportation that participated in the extreme deterioration of local conditions of life.

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 was deeply modified. The invaders came in a spirit of conquest and domination and they soon justified their domination in the name of the pretended superiority of the conquering power which was meant to civilise these poor countries. Of course it was only a discourse that had nothing to do with reality and was created out of nothing by the invading forces in the intention to justify their unjustifiable acts. This discourse was mainly “explained” by racist considerations that the invaders pretended to base on so-called scientific observations. 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 became very effective when it impacted on the general image the colonised people finally adopted 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, seemed to prove the truth of this

fallacious talk and of this contempt of the colonised culture which the colonised people soon adopted also for themselves. The dysfunction of traditional societies under the impact of the de-structuration enforced by the conquest seemed to add still more arguments to prove the superiority of the invaders. This “superiority” was certainly in a certain way real but it was yet in nothing cultural or related with civilisation. It was just limited to the military superiority of the conquering nations: they had simply better weapons. It had indeed nothing to do with an ethical or civilizational superiority. All the contrary. It relied just on a pure capacity to be violent. Nothing glorious indeed.

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.

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. 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 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 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 second 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 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.

The image of the other

We tend to describe the "Others" in ways that justify our fears and intentions, and explain our difficult relationship with them.

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

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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 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 to present 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.

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. But it is essential to notice how much our western culture approaches then the phenomenon of terrorism through this lens Edward Said describes. We create a description of an offensive Islam. This image is shaped by westerners in order to regulate our relationships with Islam in the way we intend to, i.e. in considering Islam globally as the danger and the enemy to annihilate (which is absurd). It is clear that such an approach can only generate a more aggressive response when it describes the other in negative terms because it has been declared the absolute enemy. 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 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 alive, based on what the other is and especially shaped by the expression of what this other 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.

Out of this long description the main lesson to be retained is probably the following: diversity is the general law and we have to learn how to help diversity to express itself and to be respected. It means that 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. It aims at having anybody recognised for what they are. Plurality is the immediate consequence. It becomes possible again to be Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist in any southern or western country. Minorities become then small cores of different ways of perception and thinking. They do not pretend to represent the national identity – if such a thing exists – because they are only smaller minorities but they are nevertheless little stones in the mosaic. Difference is then no more considered as an exception, as something that has to adapt and conform to the dominant trend. It is a wealth and its own character of diversity is

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precisely what makes it so valuable. The whole community or nation takes pride in its own diversity because it is what builds its strength and wealth.

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 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.

The first step of rejection of the dominating model needs to destroy the illusion that it has created as well as its attraction generated by the fact it has been imposed as the success model or the model of the dominating class, whether it is the model imported by the invader or the one adopted by the collaborating elite. No liberation can happen if the imported model is not dismantled.

As I just described it earlier, the second step consists in searching in the traditional roots what still prevails after getting free from the

dominating model and in rebuilding an authentic anthropology that truly belongs to the local land. This is of course the ideal process that rarely happens in such a peaceful way because the violence of the context of colonialism cannot be eradicated in such a short time, especially when the southern countries experiment new acts of invasion by ex-colonists. The recent scenarios in Afghanistan and Iraq are clearly acts of new violence that restart the conflict. The “insurgents” (the resisting forces) react with the same means of violence. Even in peaceful conditions this process of rediscovery of one’s own identity reveals itself to be a violent process: as at the birth so many resistances have to be broken. This is like a radical psychotherapy with all the different stages of returning to oneself.

We need urgently, as westerners, to understand how much we have, through long centuries, created the present situation that explodes now in our face. We exacerbate it even more nowadays in our western suburbs 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 to the western way of life and imitate us fully as if it were for them the only possible salvation, and that they follow our own values. If they don’t, we feel threaten. 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 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.

On top of our requirement for them to adapt completely and to leave their own identity behind at the entrance door as a clothes they would have discarded and replaced by a more suitable façade, we depict them in negative ways according to the method that Edward Said describes about Orientalism: we pretend to know everything about their own culture and we allow ourselves to paint this image we have of themselves. But this image is only our construct inasmuch as it fits our perceptions, our project, our privileges and especially also as it allows us to manage our relationships with these “foreign” people we want to be different from what they are indeed.

The way out of this infernal cycle is more in our hands than in the hands of these youngsters. If we want to protect them from the influence of radical criminals who exploit their anger, we have to give them more chances to be seen, listened to and recognised for what they are. When we will truly care for them we will be able to listen to them and understand them better.

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 established ourselves 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 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 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 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. What does not suit western women cannot suit eastern women either.

All people need to be able to express whom 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

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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.

If in our modern society we can learn to be ourselves and to dialog with people who are different, we will discover a wealth of treasures. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Shinto, animists, yellow, black, red, white will bring their unknown identity and heritage to the common debate about our common future. Each will dare to be oneself. The black will not have to be white in order to be accepted. The Amerindian will not be said to be an apple (red outside but white inside). He will be fully Amerindian and enrich us with his tradition. We need today more than ever to be taught how to handle

nature and his heritage will be one of the best sources to do so. This is only one example among eight billions people and their possible combinations!

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 awkwardness 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 simplistic 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 is a spirit of openness and it expresses 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 has 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.

Complementarity as a return to life

We have seen so far how femininity and its qualities are mainly recessives and how the main stages of the evolution of mankind have allowed masculinity to dominate more and more and to erase more and 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. Let's now examine how feminine and masculine trends are 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.

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5) 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 (TITLES AND SHORT WORDINGS)

An essay in seven volumes 2

CHANGE AS A SEARCH FOR TRUTH 4

- A necessity for change 4
- Six imbalances 5
- The risk of generalisations 6
- A testimony 7
- The power of truth 11

1) THE GENDER EXPERIENCE 12

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 safety. 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 20

The threat of the power of giving birth 20

The feminine power of giving birth is perceived by masculinity as subversive because it creates life and develops in a hidden place. 20

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 22

Sense of exclusion, fear of the subversive power of life and dominance translate the need of masculinity to control femininity. 22

St 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 27

By analogy with biology, masculinity may be said to be a dominant character and feminine a recessive one. Yet they are both essential. 27

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

Vocation and subsistence

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| Dominating masculinity or denial of differences | 35 | Domination of scientific thinking generates an illusion of being all-powerful, at the expense of a search for the sacred mystery. | 54 |
| Roles according to genders | 35 | 4) Loss of humanity | 56 |
| Privileges, power and preferences participate to define social roles, based on gender identities, between conformism and exclusion. | 35 | Domination of other races and cultures imposes an artificial hierarchy between peoples that distorts our common humanity. | 56 |
| Women's liberation movement | 38 | 5) Loss of being | 59 |
| Women's liberation has broken open a vicious circle of false representations / situations of oppression. It has empowered us all. | 38 | The exclusive focus on material production and profit has destroyed our ability to experience how life consists in just being. | 59 |
| Gender specialisation | 39 | 6) Loss of community | 61 |
| In traditional societies social roles are defined according to gender but this does not create a hierarchy of value between people. | 39 | Exploitation has imposed the law of individualism and destroys our sense of belonging to, and caring freely for, a wider community. | 61 |
| The unisex issue | 41 | 7) Loss of empowerment | 65 |
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| Our human history and evolution is characterised by a constant development by stages of the domination of Yang over Yin values. | 42 | The boomerang effect | 68 |
| Western domination and racism | 47 | Our western society has developed a powerful capacity to dominate but domination does not act only on the other: it fires back. | 68 |
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| Domination as destruction of life | 50 | Domination can repress the expression of Life but Life can never be destroyed. It remains the energy that will bring us back to Life. | 73 |
| Domination (exploitation of nature, repression of femininity, rejection of spirituality) leads to destruction of life and of relationships. | 50 | The path of liberation | 73 |
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| Domination over nature prevents us from listening to its generous teaching about the essence of life and from adapting to its laws. | 51 | True debate | 75 |
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