

**Towards reconciliation  
between femininity and masculinity  
in search of a new anthropology**

# **Recessive and Dominant**

**Yves de Morsier**

**This book is different from other studies that talk about gender.** It intends to go far beyond the gender issue. It wants to delve into the deeper meaning of what femininity and masculinity mean as qualities.

**It will start illustrating how our personal aptitudes and attitudes are often linked with our gender.** Not that we are defined by our gender, but because the experience of our gender provides us with special skills and qualities. For instance the ability to give birth fosters in women a special disposition for being caring and compassionate. Motherhood nourishes aptitudes for listening, dialogue, peace. This represents rather a potential our gender offers to us; than a constraint it forces upon us.

**This predisposition is the path to freedom because it is not deterministic.** Men can be tender. Women can be strong. A whole range of attitudes is open to each of us. We must learn the freedom of spirit to follow this inestimable potential and to express it in the way that suits us best. Gender is then more a potential than a constraint.

**Femininity and masculinity urgently need to be rediscovered as qualities that can mix and combine endlessly,** creating in this way a richer range of opportunities. The number of combinations is infinite.

**We should rather talk in terms of Yin and Yang, as the two poles that influence our lives,** no longer so narrowly linked with gender. It remains our responsibility to choose which qualities we will nurture and which one we will oppose. Out of these many choices ensues the quality of our life and of the world we live in. All attitudes are not equal. Some foster compassion and life, other foster hatred, violence and destruction.

**Finally the most precious qualities in life need to be protected if we want them to thrive.** Compassion, care, listening, dialogue, inclusiveness can only develop if we are committed to provide the right conditions for them to flourish. Because their quality is fragile, they are said to be **RECESSIVE**; while the antagonistic forces are said to be **DOMINANT** (like genes in in biology). This understanding traces a new path of liberation from false representations. Whether women or men, we all become free to act in a creative way.

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GENDER & ETHICS



**The author, Yves de Morsier,**

born in French speaking Switzerland in the 1950s, architect by training, proposes here a very practical approach that draws from about 50 years of experience in forms of gentle development, in Europe and Australia, that aim at a fair sharing of common resources. He lives on the South Coast of New South Wales (Australia) where, with his wife Ursula, he has built an off-grid solar-powered rammed earth house, facing a national park, where they experiment with new ways of sharing and facilitate times of meditation and workshops.

See: [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au)

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*A strategy for change and a search for meaning, for a creative response to climate change, economic inequity and democratic collapse.*

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\* \* \*

## **A manifesto in six volumes:**

The present book is part of a manifesto in 6 volumes – here Nr 3 – about 6 major imbalances of our time.

Each volume can be read separately and in any order.

### **Vol. 1) Effort and comfort:**

*towards reconciliation between nature and humanity  
in search of harmony and peace of mind.*

**Published: Desert Creek House Publishing, 2022**

### **Vol. 2) Vocation and subsistence:**

*towards reconciliation between simplicity and wealth  
in search of a new anthropology.*

**Published: Desert Creek House Publishing, 2023**

### **Vol. 3) Recessive and dominant (this present volume):**

*towards reconciliation between femininity and masculinity  
in search of a new anthropology.*

**Published: Desert Creek House Publishing, 2024**

### **Vol. 4) Circular and linear:**

*towards reconciliation between South and North,  
in search of an end to white supremacy.*

### **Vol. 5) Knowledge and learning:**

*towards reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect,  
in search of a new incarnation of our spiritual aspirations.*

### **Vol. 6) Spirit and matter:**

*towards reconciliation between Reality and appearances,  
in search of true being.*

**Volumes 0 to 4 are already published or soon ready to be published. Until these books are printed, they can be downloaded for free from our website:**

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FEMININITY  
MASCULINITY  
GENDER  
IDENTITY  
YIN  
YANG  
LIBERATION

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*To the women who inspired me by their ways of being:  
among my relatives, Odile and Ursula,*

*among women I admire, Mary of Magdala, Hildegard  
of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, Simone Weil, Etty Hillesum,  
Rosa Parks, Anna Akhmatova, Ella Maillart, Mother  
Teresa, Wangari Maathai, Maria Ressa, Mechelle  
Turvey,*

*among women of the young generation Malala  
Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Anjali Sharma.*

*And so many others... Especially the invisible women  
who remain unknown because they work discretely in  
their surroundings, among others; such as the  
movement of the Mothers of the Plaza di Mayo in  
Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the 1970s; or the present  
movement of Women Wage Peace in Israel, or Women  
of the Sun in Palestine;*

*they are often the creators of life, the true instigators of  
solidarity, reconciliation, peace, because they naturally  
practise care and compassion and inclusiveness.*

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## **Introduction**

This book intends to go much beyond the question of gender. More than genders, masculinity and femininity are qualities and attitudes. They propose different ways to apprehend life. And this is what matters. This will be the topic of this book.

We will show how masculinity and femininity, or the lack or excess of it, affect our society. They are indeed at the core of the perceptions, qualities, intentions, choices that lead our human society.

But, before we examine these deeper issues, we have to come back to the origin of the gender difference. It is why, although it is not the main topic of this book, we will first start with a better understanding of what gender means because this is the root of everything, the source of life itself. At least in physical terms.

## **More than gender**

It is clear to me, my hen is a female, my rooster is a male. These are the two only possible genders. In this basic version the gender issue seems simple. But there is a small knot: I forgot to ask my hen how she feels to be a hen, and how she feels when I think she is a hen, that is a female. How she feels that I expect her to lay eggs. I have a clear idea of who she is or at least what her social function is. This is where the trouble starts.

## ***The social construct***

We will first investigate gender as a clear physical difference between male and female. This is biological, neutral, objective. But we will not be satisfied to remain on this level. There is more

to this because, to this minor difference, we have linked representations of our own.

We will see how in traditional societies the members of the household – this is the wider family that includes also some relatives and even foreign workers – have to practise all the tasks for their common subsistence. Specialisation occurs because nobody can master all tasks; and it is easier to specialise, just for the sake of not being overwhelmed by the large amount of tasks and their respective pressures that occur all at the same time.

And specialisation happens according to the gender line. Hence the woman will take over the task of giving birth (this is not a choice!), and raising children, and, while doing this, taking upon herself to do the tasks that take place at home because it is where the children stay when they are small. This includes often the maintenance of the garden, which is just outside on the other side of the kitchen wall. This is the traditional pattern.

In parallel the man is working in the field or cutting wood or repairing the house. The specialisation remains very practical. It goes along these lines: the woman has the role of feeding and comforting the members of the family while the man has the role of structuring and protecting the tribe. So far no problem. This is just a form of organisation of the family business.

But we will also see how soon a corrupting element intervenes: the impact of hierarchy. The distribution of tasks does not consist any more in an objective organisational process, but it transforms into a subjective process of interpretation that establishes hierarchy. The practical process becomes a social construct that happens in two stages. First it interprets roles and attributes them different values; it creates hierarchy. And second it defines these roles as social obligations that will confirm the hierarchy; this is no longer a fact of nature; it is a social creation; it is culture.



And this is where the problem with gender starts. It is not the objective physical difference, but it is the social construct that creates the problem. The physical difference leaves everybody free to express their gender identity as they wish to. But it is the social construct that creates a hierarchy which is humiliating for most women (and even for men) and dictates obligations which are pure cultural fictions.

### *Aptitudes and attitudes*

Now, let's look at the problem from a different angle.

In a simplified way we could say that the act of giving birth and the role of raising children contribute to develop, in the way women perceive their role and understand life, a special ability to practise care and compassion, and to forget oneself to be more available to the dependents that are weak and fragile creatures. This is at least the dominant trend that the ability to give birth fosters in individuals, principally women.

On the other hand the very concrete role of the man to structure the environment and to offer a frame of security to his family develops in the man a special ability to shape and control his environment. He develops strength and will for power that can be used for the good of the whole family or tribe... or for his own advantage.

But we will see that the contrast between these feminine and masculine skills is not so clearly delimited. There is a continuous range of attitudes and aptitudes from the most feminine to the most masculine. Each one can situate oneself where they want on this line between two poles; and this independently whether he or she is male or female.

This means that there is not only a social construct that dictates roles and hierarchy. There is also a wide range of aptitudes and

attitudes that allow each person to develop special skills and gifts and potentials; and these qualities are different for each individual. Some of these skills are linked with gender, or rather with the social role defined around it; some are just personal skills that develop through personal experience, linked or not with gender roles. There are men who act in caring and compassionate ways; there are women who act in structuring and powerful ways. This is evident. Everyone is in principle able to act as they wish to. Gender offers potentials; gender, as such, does not exclude any ability.

We will see how Chinese philosophy describes these two poles of femininity and masculinity as Yin and Yang. This is a very good way to dissociate these qualities from gender. Yet it remains true that they are also linked with the experience of gender which is not the same for both genders. Women give birth, men do not. And the natural tendency of women to care for others comes from their ability to give birth. But this is not absolute, and it is not exclusive.

As we see there are many levels and many components that define the different possible expressions of gender. And on top of them there is the personal choice to act in a way or another, as long as the context permits this freedom.

One thing is certain and we will illustrate it: the game of the social construct has become all powerful and defines whom we have to be. In this way we have lost everything that matters most because we have lost our creativity and our complementarity.

### *Rehabilitating the feminine*

As we can observe, everybody is a loser in this system of social construct. Each person has their role imposed that excludes many

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aspects of life and forces people into tasks and roles they probably do not want to practise.

We have lost the possibility to move along the continuous range that goes from the most Yin to the most Yang. Remember, in the Chinese pattern of the Yin-Yang symbol, Yin (black) grows in intensity while Yang diminishes; but at the end there remains always a small point of white (Yang) in the black. And reciprocally. Opposites always coexist. It is how balance is maintained, by interaction of antagonistic forces.

And, worse than ever, the rich range of aptitudes and attitudes and skills that goes from Yin to Yang is lost. We can see how the specialisation by gender, rigidified by the social construct and disvalued by a hierarchy that is arbitrary, generates gigantic imbalances in our world.

We will illustrate how the Yang values of domination, power, exploitation have taken control of our modern society. Market and technology are the two arms of this new Yang monster that dominates our lives. We seem also fascinated by what it offers us and we surrender to its power in the hope we will get some advantages: material wealth, power, comfort, an easy life. But the price we have to pay for these minor privileges is enormous. We have for them to renounce life in all its richness.

This will be the thesis of this book: how the impoverishment of the way we understand gender-linked attitudes and aptitudes has led us to a very mechanical and materialistic way of life. We have lost the feminine qualities and aptitudes to be compassionate, to care for one another, to share our wealth, to listen to the other, to establish ways of dialogue, to be welcoming of differences, to practise inclusiveness in order to make everyone feel welcome and to allow people with differences to fit into the social network when this network remains open and caring.

## ***Recessive and dominant***

In biology there is a concept of dominant and recessive genes. Recessive genes give way when they have to combine with dominant genes. For instance the character of blue eyes is recessive when it has to combine with brown eyes. This means – I simplify – that the child will have brown eye.

I will draw a parallel with this biological rule and apply it to the relationships between Yin and Yang. I say Yin is recessive when it has to compete with Yang. Compassion, care and inclusiveness give way when they are confronted to hate, control and exclusion.

This is why I have given this title to the book. Feminine is recessive; masculine is dominant. In order to help femininity to express itself we need to protect it from the domination of masculine values. Yin will thrive when it is not opposed by Yang. Yin and Yang can well cohabit but this needs a special protection for Yin qualities. We will see how this protection is not a fenced field, it is just our awareness how we have to favour some qualities and protect them from being squashed.

This means that our role is to awake our consciousness and to choose the values we want to express, and especially the values that foster the quality of life we wish to have. In this there is a strange parallel with the notions of non-accomplished and accomplished characters. Yin qualities are like potentials; they find their expression only if they are not squashed by dominant forces. They are unaccomplished qualities and they find their accomplishment in their expression when they have the opportunities to come to fruition, under protection.

In its last chapter the book will propose a catalogue of Yin – Yang attitudes and qualities that will show they can combine and how we may rediscover and practise them. These new qualities will enrich our lives because they will bring what matters most

and what we have so far neglected. This will be a new path for our own liberation, liberation from the oppression of false patterns, of false social constructs.

I hope this manifesto will open new perspectives for you, Reader. That it will open new horizons, beyond the question of gender that too often hides wider perspectives when it focuses on too small issues. Life is much broader than gender.

### **Change as a search for truth**

In complement to what I expressed about the thesis of this book I will now explain the approach and the method. This short part of the introduction will be repeated in each volume of this series that treats of six main imbalances of our society (to be soon described here below).

Altogether this is the story of our self-destruction and of how we can come back to life.

This book tries simultaneously to describe, in simple terms, the complex desegregation of our modern western society and propose simple practical ways of transformation of our patterns of development, through transformation of our attitudes and behaviours in our everyday life. It describes the many deep imbalances which are causing the deterioration of our living conditions and are generating ever 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***

Our world suffers deeply and terribly: exploitation, destruction of nature and biodiversity, climate change, pollution, 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 continues endlessly.

There is an urgent need for change and 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 our own resignation and how to start a move towards change. We seem to be irremediably trapped on the track of our own destruction. We seem to be incapable of reaction, as if we were paralysed; paralysed rabbits in the headlights.

This book is a form of 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 a work of personal interpretation that does not pretend to be universal! It is unavoidable that any psychotherapy is always painful. These descriptions are not very flattering, but they nevertheless should help us to see the truth about our common behaviours and the dominant values that lead them.

Truth is often hard to say and hard to hear, especially when it challenges us and shows our worst sides. In this case it certainly hurts, but it is also liberating. We must learn to be tender with people and ourselves, but hard with facts and attitudes. We must

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accept that there cannot be any radical change without this effort to see things as they are, even if this 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.

We can say that this is a spiritual path in the way it touches our humanity, our deep nature, our vocation, our aspiration for happiness and for a better life, for ourselves and for others. Change, when it is so fundamental, cannot be led by material considerations. It has to be guided by spiritual values like justice, peace, compassion. It has to be more rooted in our being than in our acting. It concerns more the nature of our personal or collective attitudes than the question of the technical means we can implement to correct only minor dysfunctions. It is essentially a philosophical choice, a choice about the meaning of life.

I will show how self-limitation is the necessary path for change; first because self-limitation helps to limit the negative impact we have on our natural and social milieu, but essentially also because it opens us to the unknown 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 research, I have identified six main imbalances which threaten our world. I intend to describe each of these imbalances, each one in a separate book, 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. The problem reveals 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 it to come to full expression. These six imbalances are between:

- 1) humanity and nature,
- 2) wealth and simplicity,
- 3) masculine (Yang) and feminine (Yin),
- 4) Northern cultures and Southern cultures,
- 5) intellect and subtle faculties,
- 6) appearances and Reality.

In each of these polarities the domination of the first term over the second prevents the second from being fully expressed. Thus the polarity – in its imbalance - also represents the key to the neglected potential of these unexpressed faculties; they challenge us to leave more space for these weaker qualities to become more creative and to express what has been lost. It is why these same polarities offer also the necessary instructions for a deep transformation of our society. It is also why 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 be tamed and to adapt, in a form of reconciliation between the two concerned poles.

According to this new order, these six imbalances or polarities are the following:

- 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, on the search for an end to white supremacy.
- 5) Knowledge and learning: towards a reconciliation between subtle faculties and intellect, on the search for a new incarnation of our spiritual aspirations.
- 6) Spirit and matter: towards a reconciliation between Reality and appearances, on the search for true being.

Each of these imbalances will be presented in 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.

### *The risk of generalisations*

In order to make things more explicit, 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 leading factor which is yet not always systematically true. Generalisation is a good way to emphasise a dominating trend which can only be recognised beyond complexity and diversity.

In these books I will try to describe our modern western (or Northern) 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. If we accept here not to make any distinction between colonisers and ex-colonies, one could say that these rich nations are mainly the ones of North America and

Europe, including Australia, New Zealand, Japan and a few others.

In the same way of generalisation, I will talk about traditional societies. These are mainly the indigenous societies which developed in the southern countries as well as the traditional societies 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 the 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 as search for truth*

Each of the following statements is more a point of view, a testimony and a challenge, a call for change 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, altogether, to represent 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.

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Yet it is also important to see that this perennial Truth (capital T) exists as such, independently from what we say or believe. We cannot cheat: our own truth must be in conformity with the perennial Truth. This means we cannot shape the world at will! Luckily. Once we accept this elementary constraint, we can be open to other expressions, yet remain critical.

Dialogue in this understanding is not the conflicting confrontation of different opposed opinions but, on the contrary, the attempt to synthesise them into a wider all-encompassing multidimensional picture. This can only happen at a higher level where general rules of composition can be found that allow to organise the way sometimes antagonistic elements integrate into the whole. At the level of the organ, the hand seems to be in disagreement with the foot, because they are different, but, at a higher level, the unity of the body organises them in a coherent whole.

There is yet a big handicap in our search for multidimensional truth. Our post-modern society has developed a way to respect each expression of truth as equivalent. By respect of diversity we accept any expression and fall then into the other extreme: everything goes. It seems that, in the name of freedom of expression, any truth can be asserted, even if blatantly incoherent and falsified. Privileges and interests dominate the way fake news and fake information are spread. False information and videos are even produced at purpose. These corrupted elements infect the debate and falsify our talks. The art of debate is nowadays condemned because it relies then on pure confrontation. Our world is split and has to relearn how to listen carefully to the stand of the others, in respect for what they say, but in a critical mind that does not accept cheating. Truth is an inevitable force in our world.

## *Dismantling a system of self-defence*

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 living are firmly consolidated in a rational construct which accepts no crack. It is like a fortress which prevents the unknown to enter, although the major part of this representation keeps ignoring most aspects of life, as it is an artificial rational construction made by the mere addition of a limited number of simple parts without generally structuring order.

It is a left brain re-presentation (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 grasp but only experience<sup>1</sup>. This struggle between our many aptitudes of perceiving the context of our existence 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 rational 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, which are based on mainly technical considerations, and we can only do so if we escape from our imprisonment by our rational mind in the fortress of our false representations and privileges.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Each description I will illustrate of this better path will probably seem lacking consistence or being too idealist. 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. 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 living.

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, how to purchase local products or the 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 express 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 patterns<sup>2</sup> 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 they have been adapted to the local culture and conditions, consists of a personal or collective choice (or commitment) which depends on us only and on the way we want to interact with the world. As citizens and consumers, we are in fact the real actors of our world. We have to choose consciously which options we want to follow, as well individually as collectively.

The description of these patterns starts with a title and a statement on two lines that summarise the option. Then each statement (or option) is explained in a few 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 (or options) with their titles and their two-line summary. This is a way to summarise the content of the whole book.

The proposed options 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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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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 describe 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.

### *In a nutshell*

Before I describe further on, in more detail, the different options which this book will propose, we can summarise the main orientation of the proposed change in mentioning the principal orientations 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 and relationships over material purposes. This form of intentional self-restriction is a form of liberation which brings real happiness: *small is beautiful*.
- **Cooperation:** 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.
- **Local community and consensus:** 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. Originally 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 us ordinary people, although certainly some people have more impact than others.
- **Whitewashing and corruption:** the goods we consume are generally produced in conditions based on exploitation of the poorest or of poorer countries and on 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 produced 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 (goods to acquire, technology to use, means of transport, travel, use of energy, work, priorities, values, etc.) is a vote which encourages the production or the behaviour or the belief or the values which are validated by this choice. We are therefore responsible for each of our choices 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*

The above points closely relate to what I said earlier about the search for truth, which is well illustrated by the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who practised his own truth rigorously and freely. He called this practice the power of truth (satyagraha in Hindi). He showed us the way of integrity (remaining whole) and the importance of our own testimony in fostering the change we want to see in the world. Life has its own dynamic and energy, even its own orientation and maybe also will. This is the energy that animates the universe. We cannot go against this life energy; we have to adapt to it. Truth is then what is compatible with this energy of life and its coherence. What goes against it is not truth. In staying faithful to our understanding of life and truth, and to our own spiritual path, which is a search rather than a ready-made answer, we become more creative and capable of following our own vocation. We take the opportunity of being recognised and appreciated by our own community for what we are. Is that not a more positive path to happiness than trying to conform to the kind of success promoted by our materialistic society and which is merely a frustrating and disturbing illusion? The practice of the power of truth is the most powerful non-violent way to convince others and change our world to be more humane, as well as to change ourselves to help us discover the depth of life and real happiness. Be happy, radiate joy ... and others will follow you!

## Chapter 1: The gender experience

### Complementarity, specialisation, hierarchy

First we need to clarify a few concepts in order to avoid misunderstandings in the following comments.

#### From the difference to the hierarchy

*The gender difference defines a complementarity of two equal genders. But the social construct creates a hierarchy and imposes rules of behaviour.*

Since the origin of time, gender has been one of the principal characteristics on which our social organisation 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 organised social structure, or of any anthropology or sociological transformation or interpretation. The survival of the tribe being the necessary condition for life, the complementarity between genders was originally the basic condition for its organisation and security. The difference between genders was originally biologic and concerned principally the way the tribe could ensure its duration through reproduction. From a more practical point of view it defined a specialisation of the roles of each gender according to its function and role to ensure the subsistence of the whole tribe.

In the traditional setting there is a strong specialisation of tasks according to gender. This specialisation is necessary because the number and diversity of tasks is enormous and overwhelming: giving birth, feeding, cultivating, harvesting, protecting, educating, building, heating, providing, sharing, laughing, and so

many others. Specialisation allows each member to inherit a reduced number of tasks on which they can concentrate except in cases when help is needed by the others. This specialisation is originally defined according to the gender line and for very practical reasons. The mother gives birth and raises the children. As this happens mainly at home, she takes on herself the other tasks at home, like for instance the maintenance of the garden which is usually just situated in front of the house. In parallel the man works in the fields or cuts the wood or brings water. He does also most of the building work and repairs to maintain the house and other necessary structures, like the water wheel. In time of intensive seasonal work for harvest or in case of special dangers all members join their efforts.

As we can see the organisation according to genders is very practical. It does not create hierarchy. Any task is a necessary task. This is just a principle of equality and complementarity on which the traditional tasks specialisation is organised. This means that, if I empty my composting toilet, if I prepare the meal, if I cut wood, if I teach children, if I am an elder that inspires the whole community, my work is equally considered as useful. Some members can be more highly estimated than others, but it is not because of their tasks, but rather because of the way they do what they do. The difference is between a good and a bad teacher, a good and a bad gardener.

It is only on this natural basis of gender complementarity and tasks specialisation that, later, the social construct takes shape. The social construct consists in a system that stipulates the social rules that define the roles and positions of each category of persons in the society. The paradox is that gender has soon become much more than a biological character since it has been, beyond biological specificities, principally translated into a main social component, which has been from time immemorial constantly shaping the main aspects of our society and culture.

Out of biological or other similar differences culture creates a social structure.

### **The social hierarchy and more contrasts**

***The social construct creates a hierarchy between the tasks, which defines a hierarchy between people. It stipulates the rules that confirm this new order and cares for its enforcement.***

The social construct is an artificial creation principally defined by the most influential people (people in power) who try to justify their status of domination in declaring that they are superior. The social construct reinterprets the differences (diversity) in attaching to each category a value that does not depend on the people and the ways they behave but on differences between trades, genders, appearance, wealth. It is essential to see that the construct is not an objective product of reality but a subjective interpretation that suits the elite. The social construct has probably a necessity to establish a structure for together-living but it goes much beyond this necessity. It consolidates indeed a state of inequality and explains or rather justifies it.

The social construct does three things.

- First, it creates a hierarchy in evaluating – subjective interpretation – that some tasks or qualities or attributes are superior to others. Not because of the way people perform these tasks as such but as marks of social identities. Working manually is less estimated than working intellectually. Emptying the composting toilet is less estimated than baking bread. The quality how the task is performed does not influence this hierarchy.
- Second, the hierarchy of tasks or attributes, although artificial, becomes the rule. The classification of tasks or

attributes by categories of unequal values impacts also on people. This means that people are also classified in categories according to their work or social position. Better work is better paid and provides more wealth and more status. This is a very short way to describe the process but social classes are based on this type of distinctions. The system generally consolidates a state of domination of one category of people over the other. Owners over workers, natives over strangers, men over women. This is the final purpose: to establish the dominance of a class over another. The evaluation of the tasks is in this finally very insignificant. This is just used to establish the social hierarchy.

- Third, once the system of domination is established, some general principles of behaviour are formulated in order to provide rules to guide main social behaviour. The rules confirm the social order and consolidate it. The necessary institutions are established to enforce the new order and ensure that it remains unchanged.

But there is more to this. Gender can be seen as a biological difference or as a social construct, but it can also be seen as an expression of the quality of behaviour it favours. Beyond the strict physical difference between male and female we have also the notions of masculinity and femininity. These concepts are wider than just gender. They define the kind of behaviours that each one of us adopts, independently of whether we are women or men. There are feminine qualities that are clearly different from masculine qualities.

In the same way we can interpret gender in terms of Yin and Yang, as the two poles that influence our behaviours whoever we are, female or male, woman or man. Each of us, as human being, is caught between these two poles like, in electricity, between the

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positive and negative poles. Our behaviours can be interpreted as rather feminine (Yin) or rather masculine (Yang). For instance, care is perceived as Yin, power as Yang. Care or power can be indifferently practised by women or men.

I am aware that this very short description of the social construct and of the poles that influence our behaviours is a simplification of reality. But it was necessary to make it a simplified sketch in order to make clear on which level we situate ourselves when we talk about gender. This can be done on the level of the biological difference or on the level of the hierarchy or in terms of qualities (masculine-feminine or Yin-Yang). I will make it clear, in the next comments, on which level we will situate ourselves, because it makes all the difference.

Yet, despite all the nuances I just summarily described, the origin of the fundamental difference between both genders is first not social but biological. It is then worth starting our reflexion on gender and Yin-Yang balance by trying to go back to the root of the difference. Beyond its social interpretation and the different qualities of behaviour that it may foster, what is the original gender experience that ensues out of the organic difference?

### **The gender paradox: biological or social**

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

This is a very positive inheritance of modernity that we are able today to question our respective social roles and especially to reflect on how the differences between genders are impacting on the way we build our social relationships. Beyond biological differences social relationships are shaped principally by our conventional representations how each gender does or should experience life and how it should consequently behave. This is

what the social construct does. Most societies, despite their many differences, have long been used to believe that gender, as an important qualifier of identity, is meant to define what is necessary, possible and acceptable for each person, precisely because of an untold link between role and gender that define roles and obligations. But we dare nowadays to question these definitions and we challenge the ways 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.

Modernity seems to have disconnected social roles from gender differences to the point that there seems to be no link between both. Gender seems to be a choice rather than a given. It is true that, in our modern urban society, the necessary tasks of subsistence are much less defined than in traditional societies, at least much less defined by gender. We are now used to have a job and earn money that enables us to get what we need on the market. The specific roles of genders and the specialisation they used to define have strongly disappeared from our experience.

The difference is strongly of social nature, more than task related. The great paradox in the way we treat the gender issue today is that it is often considered from an essentially social point of view before it is related to the biological difference that grounds our diversity. We address the inequalities that are based on gender differences – and it is urgent to do so – before we refer to the fundamental organic difference. And we do not try to know what the true essence of this difference originally is and what it means for our social construct.

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 differences between genders. Yet equality and

equity are not incompatible with differences. In fact there are many important differences between both genders and that is what makes the topic so fascinating! To ignore these differences is a terrible impoverishment.

I believe that we will only be able to change the way we look at gender and rediscover the essential parameters if we start from the evidence that the difference between genders is a fundamental one. And it is originally of biological nature. Women give birth and men do not. Men beget and women do not.

Based on this essential difference, our respective life experiences can only be fundamentally different for women and men. This does not mean that all our experiences are different or that this difference regulates everything but it means that this organic difference is the root of the issue. This does not mean either that this organic difference should be interpreted as the cause for a hierarchy of values between genders.

Before we investigate what culture makes out of gender, I propose to try first to rediscover in which way genders, because of their biological difference, foster different life experiences and therefore different perceptions of life that will then generate further different understandings of what life is, or further different attitudes in our reactions to life circumstances. And this before any social construct comes into play to consolidate these differences or to exploit them.

The question will be: before it becomes the criteria for hierarchy, 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 past and present social constructs that are inevitably linked with this essential difference.

### Two natures – two experiences

I will now try to describe what makes the specificity of experiences of each gender, in general terms. I do this from my own point of view, as an observer of what I see around me, or in myself. Being a man – with the experience as a father of two children in whose care and education I have been intensively involved – I cannot share the experience of women from inside. But I can hear what women share with me and observe what I see.

### Two contrasting experiences

*Pregnancy teaches women the art of introverted attention and predisposition for caring; while the male partner develops extroverted skills as provider of structure.*

Let's be clear. We speak here in terms of personal experiences by gender, rooted in biological or psychological processes, and not in terms of social constructs or imposed rules or values, nor even in terms of qualities or independent personal choices. We try to go back to the root of the question of gender and see how experiences can diverge according to gender.

- Women during pregnancy experience mainly what happens inside themselves, i.e. in their womb but also in their whole body and in their psyche; or in reactions how people perceive them as pregnant women. 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.
- By contrast men are not in touch with this inner experience of pregnancy because they do not have direct access to it, as a feeling in their own body, although they learn more and more

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in our modern society to take part in it in a more direct way. As men want usually to be participants they see their role as supports and protectors. Traditionally they become, rather naturally and spontaneously, aware of their role as providers of the external conditions for structure and safety.

In this fundamental difference between the respective roles of the two parents lays probably the potential for conflict and oppression as it can also be perceived as the opportunity for complementarity and harmony. The feminine role appears to focus essentially on the depth of an inner experience of fostering 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 basic description seems to contain all the premises of what grounds the difference of experiences between genders.

- On the one hand there is, on the female side, the depth of experience of the power of giving shape to a new human being and later of giving birth that remains mysterious and fragile.
- 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 the woman for fostering life while the woman envies the man for defining the external structure. The conflict may only be avoided when both partners understand their respective specialised roles as generous contributions to a wider picture or context they are indeed creating together. This is a difference without

hierarchy. Both parents 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.

This form of specialisation that arises out of biological differences will nevertheless extend beyond the time of the birth and very probably characterise both experiences also during the early stages of development of the new born child, after birth and during the early years of childhood. This contrast or complementarity will remain engraved in the memory of the species and will be transmitted to further generations as an inheritance about what gender is. Out of this picture (which remains a pattern more than a practical reality) we are all individually, more or less, free to shape our lives, by identifying with the pattern as described here, or, more creatively, by taking more liberty with its modelling power.

Yet, independently of the richness of the personal experience and the personal freedom to translate it in many different ways, the social frame and culture have consolidated specific roles for each gender and never stop putting pressure on women and men to conform to these consolidated role models which contrast drastically with our personal experiences. This is also our role to choose how far we intend to conform or not to these social or cultural rules.

### *Yin and Yang*

***Feminine and masculine qualities are complementary to one another; they always mingle and combine in infinite ways. Each one, independently of gender, is free to practise them.***

Now we will no longer speak on the biological level but we will move to the level of the diverse possible human qualities that can be nourished by gender experiences but are yet not necessarily related to gender.

Chinese philosophy has described how opposite qualities – such as slow and fast or dark and light – are able to combine with one another and even become complementary, in a subtle balance that combines at the same time difference, complementarity and antagonism. Yin and Yang, as opposed qualities, combine without end with one another and each one remains always present, at least as a minimum, in the other when it is at its maximum.



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 remains still a minimum of the other (a dot). Yin and Yang are two poles that combine in many ways. There is never a total contrast between black and white and none is ever absolute because there is always a bit of black in the white; and reciprocally. Each one needs the other to be complete.

This is also what happens between 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.

As I described earlier, the female experience of fostering life and giving birth generates feminine qualities of care and nurturing skills of introversion; and 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 general pattern, directly linked with the experience, which does not exclude the development of other opposed secondary (or even predominant) qualities and skills. In the case of gender

distinction, the contrast between opposed qualities is never absolute, it is never so sharp, as it is not either between Yin and Yang. We all have many diversified tendencies to develop our own and personal aptitudes and complementary skills, in relatively contrasting ways and proportions, given our gender, but also and principally given our personality.

Whether female or male, we are always a bit of both. It means that, like in the combination of Yin and Yang, the male, although principally male, will also develop some feminine qualities while the female, although principally female, will also develop some masculine qualities. The nature or proportion of feminine and masculine qualities in each one of us varies very much from one person to the next. It happens even often that some men may have acquired more feminine qualities than some other women do, yet without ceasing so far to be men; and reciprocally. In fact we are all men and women at the same time, masculine and feminine, Yang and Yin, in proportions that vary according to our gender but also to our person. Gender is a complex issue that is far from being predefined by our sex.

Yin in Chinese philosophy represents the quality that is introverted, caring, accepting, nurturing. Yang is the quality that is extraverted, defending, structuring. We recognise here the distinction I have established between gender experiences. The mixture of opposed qualities I mention here explains that 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 between these two poles a form of antagonism that is creative, a form of antinomy that helps the opposed extremes to combine while they appear not to be exclusive.

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This dualistic description is still incomplete because it ignores the main factor, which consists in the general balance between these two antagonistic forces. This balance is the third factor without which the pattern cannot be complete. The combination is not a dualistic solution but it is a ternary equation, i.e. with three factors: the Yin, the Yang and the right balance between both. There is a dynamic dance of these three factors that never stops evolving. When one factor moves the two others react. It is how a real dynamic is created and maintained as a living ever changing energy.

### **Yin or feminine qualities**

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

First thing to be said: if motherhood has strongly defined the archetype of what it is to be a woman, it remains nevertheless true that a person can be a woman without being a mother. Motherhood and womanhood are related but they can also, in a certain way, be disconnected. I want here to examine what it can mean to be a mother and what it can mean to be a woman. I will do this from my point of view as a man, because I cannot adopt any other; even if I try my best to understand womanhood from the point of view of women. Big challenge.

Let's first talk about motherhood. If she is truly involved in her motherhood, the mother is attentive to what happens in herself when she is pregnant and a new life, independent of her own, develops in the deepest part of herself. She becomes a womb, focused on interiority. She is endurance and protection; she is intuition and understanding for this fragile being that takes shape in her womb. She also resonates with her own emotions, feelings and states of mind. This experience helps her to develop the

adequate faculties of care and attention that are linked with her role as a mother and to better take this role upon herself.

In short these faculties that motherhood fosters consist in empathy, care, attention, self-dedication, listening, connexion, peace-making.

To avoid confusion it is important to make here a fundamental distinction about motherhood. Life appears and develops in the mother's womb but the mother is not the creator of this life. She is only the recipient – in both meanings of receiver and container – or the channel 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 of pregnancy a pernicious confusion may often arise 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 the parents. This confusion has potentially many negative consequences on family relationships and on the development of the parents and the child later.

In this innate ability of women to be in tune with what happens inside, there is an essential question to ask: Is this attitude of receptivity ingrained in their genes or is it acquired through the function of motherhood and the social responsibility it confers? It is probably true that both causes interact and create a new inborn and acquired identity as mother-wife-woman. Genetics, gestation and experience are acting in interaction and change the person. The pattern repeats itself each time in different terms and the experience changes too. The experience of motherhood for the last born child is different from the one for the first born. And



each woman is free to reinterpret her role in order to play it in her own way.

Let's now talk about womanhood. If motherhood is the true core of femininity at its origin, it does not nevertheless define femininity in its complete range. Motherhood, or even only its potential, is only the original energy that initiates the process of forging an archetype called mother that fuses with the archetype called woman. Motherhood is the primitive root of the archetype. But womanhood is not depending on becoming a mother. The identity of woman exists independently of the archetype. Many women are who they are; without relating to their potential as mothers, even not thinking of it. Womanhood and motherhood are then disconnected.

But the physicality of being a woman remains. Every month the woman is reminded of her womanhood. Because of its physicality, this potential of motherhood continues to mark the reality of everyday, even if there is no interest to exploit it. The archetype of womanhood remains for what it has been made by past experience and culture, i.e. by its root in motherhood, but only as a potential. This root yet does not propose a readymade solution for womanhood. It challenges each one how to be a woman. This question remains very acute with its full range of possibilities.

Beyond its physicality that remains, I can observe how femininity as such, disconnected from motherhood, remains yet naturally oriented towards attitudes of deeper understanding, protection, nurturing and care. Receptivity and understanding remain the dominating qualities of feminine aptitudes. These welcoming attitudes develop in many forms of femininity beyond and independently of 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; a better capacity to listen and to understand the one who is different. It ensues out of this better understanding an attitude which is more rooted in life and does not accept non-sense so easily.

It is probably why these are often women who initiate peace processes or reconciliation. Often they do this as a collective movement. They remain often unknown as individuals but famous as a wide popular movement. There is no individual name attached to it, no famous hero, as it is rather the case with men when they act; for instance the movement of the Mothers of the Plaza di Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, protesting against the disappearance of so many of their children under the dictatorship of Jorge Videla from 1977 on, and in the 1980s; or the present movement of Women Wage Peace in Israel, or Women of the Sun in Palestine.

I describe of course here a general pattern. It does not mean that every woman evolves and behaves in conformity with this general pattern; nor that men do not. Maturity plays also a role in the evolution of such qualities that creates another layer of differences between persons.

### *Yang or masculine qualities*

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

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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 of preparing the coming of the new child involves him as much as the mother because he has to play a role that is also important.

While the mother is more in charge of what happens inside, he is traditionally in charge of the context. The role to create the external frame is essential, especially in an environment of penury or hostility, such lack of food, water, shelter or harsh climatic conditions or even enmity from other people. This requirement of shaping a welcoming context seems much easier to satisfy in our modern society that provides a relative infrastructure on which to relay, at least for the ones who can access and afford it.

But, in our modern settings, the struggle for the father remains yet similar to what it is in traditional conditions, although under different forms. The father has to provide, in a competitive context, the minimum income that allows to acquire the necessary resources and ensure the minimum comfort – I speak here in traditional terms of specialisation. He has to foresee the circumstances of the near future and prepare how to face them. This is not exclusive; the mother may also be involved.

It is why the role of the father is rather oriented towards the outer world. Transformative action, including 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. This involves not only material aspects but also, if not principally, affective and intellectual creativity and proactive thinking.

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. Dominance has to

be here understood as a skill of mastery, rather than as the power to impose one's will. This does not imply dominance over people, which can yet happen as a distortion of this form of extraversion.

As the environment is at first essentially physical – especially in a traditional setting – the man has to develop physical strength. Women develop, physically and mentally, more interiority (uterus) while men develop more exteriority (penis), in their body form as in their way to relate to others.

While women develop endurance and resilience on a longer term, men learn to be quick in their action. Traditionally quick hunting is therefore more their skill while women specialise more into slow gathering of food or picking fruits. These are traditional roles that arise naturally out of the gender difference and specialisation, without any hierarchy of values to be imposed onto them. This is the traditional pattern. This is only the pattern!

As we can observe in this description, on the archetypal level, the creativity of men contrasts with the creativity of women. The former, more extraverted, concerns rather the factor of quantity, i.e. the many elements that combine into shaping the environment; while the latter, more introverted, concerns rather the factor of quality of what affects the small community where life happens in everyday life.

### **Yin and Yang archetypes**

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

Now let's speak no longer at the level of gender experience (biological difference) but at the level of general human qualities. Although, as I have described, differences between men and women originated in their biological difference, it will

be better suited to talk of these respective qualities as Yin and Yang qualities, i.e. as if they were not directly connected with gender. It is indeed striking how much the qualities I have described as feminine or masculine are in fact not absolutely linked with gender in a rigid way, even if they originated out of the difference of experiences that are narrowly related with gender.

After arising from this basic difference they become free qualities that everybody can develop. They are like fruits that grew out of a special seed but that everybody can access. They become poles of attraction, vaguely related with a quality of gender (the Yin and the Yang), that influence our personal evolution and growth. They are sorts of archetypes that impregnate our lives as patterns of behaviour or models of attitudes that can inspire us or not, according to our personal choices. We learn truly from one another by inspiration or rejection or imitation. We are free to combine different qualities, whatever the source of inspiration or the model is. We can truly be partly man and partly woman at the same time. This opens us to an almost infinite range of possible behaviours, attitudes and aptitudes.

As explained earlier 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! And, most important, there is no hierarchy of values between both poles of the same pair. For instance strength is not better than weakness, humid is not better than dry, whatever we have learned to think of these qualities.

<u>Yin</u>	<u>Yang</u>
feminine	masculine
weakness	strength
earth	sky
obscure	clear
water	fire
humid	dry
cold	hot
internal	external
invisible	visible
closed	open
right	left
slow	quick
below	above
immobile	mobile
heavy	light
intuitive	rational
receptive	active
etc.	etc.

We can notice here an analogy between Yin and non-accomplished, and between Yang and accomplished. I will come back to this later.

These qualities go by pairs of two opposed natures as if they were incompatible with one another. 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

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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 antagonistic extremes.

We always think of antagonism as an opposition between two incompatible forces, but antagonism is a ternary balance, as the relationship between Yin and Yang. This consists in two forces and the equilibrium that rules in which proportions they combine.

In nature equilibrium is maintained by the game of action and reaction of contradictory forces that keep each other in check. This is a fundamental law of the universe we have too often tendency to forget. We all know by experience how it is difficult to keep physically or psychologically in balance. It is why nature has provided our bodies with muscles that work in contrary directions. The arm has one muscle at the front and one muscle at the back which are both active when the arm moves and both act in contradiction one with another, each one moderating the other or compensating the excesses of the other. The right equilibrium is established by very minute movements of contradictory effects that combine.

Observe how you walk. If you do so while walking very slowly, you will notice how many minute incoherent interactions of many muscles are involved which create at the end a continuous movement. But, at the minute level it is made out of the

succession of an infinity of small contradictory movements that do not make sense when considered in isolation.

We can observe the same law in social settings. The interaction of diverse persons who act independently of, and even sometimes antagonistically to, one another allows 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 opposites that combine to allow harmony to arise. 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.

This trend towards equilibrium explains why 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 two poles we find a middle-way that results out of our own attraction for these many different and often contradictory influences, in a field where opposite attractions find a dynamic balance (the third factor of the equation).

The archetypes are the components and our life is the synthesis of their respective influences combined with our choices. Archetypes work like vectors in physics, i.e. like forces illustrated by arrows that are defined by their strength (their length) and their orientation. It is possible to identify each of them but what matters is the consequent force which 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 because we are only exposed to the influences we already know. When we dare to live in an open setting, we open also ourselves to the influence of diverse forces (many vectors or many poles) 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 also can be understood as a complex field of many influencing poles or as a juxtaposition of well protected and closed paddocks. We are free to decide whether we want to live in an open field under the influence of many poles or imprisoned in hermetic closed pre-established settings.

Yin and Yang archetypes work in any case according to the pattern of opposed poles. If we play according to the rules of this open game we can be enriched by the complex and complementary influences of these many poles. We learn to be more feminine and more masculine at the same time. We learn to live in the antinomy between 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 that met in India in 1997, 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 Europe<sup>3</sup>. 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.

<u><b>feminine</b></u>	<u><b>masculine</b></u>
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

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<sup>3</sup> This document was published by Intercultural North-South Network, *Cultures and Development*, 174 rue Joseph II, Brussels, 1997. The Network does not exist any longer.

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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

Once again we speak here of qualities (or poles of influence) that characterise women and men but also influence both and can combine. Some men are in this way more feminine than other women, and reciprocally. This means that qualities overlap genders. The list above is evidently a generalisation that tries to describe average patterns (poles of influence) that are never valid in their pure expression. Yet the generalisation makes good sense as one may observe in this list. This list may otherwise be compared with the previous one that concerned the Yin and Yang qualities that are evidently narrowly related.

Out of this description a fundamental difference between femininity and masculinity as poles emerges that principally 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 favour 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 can be related to the difference of gender experience I described earlier and that also shows the complementarity of these two poles: each of us, we need attention as much as action. We need doing as much as being. One is impossible without the other. As for building a family and raising a child, difference of roles and

complementarity are both needed to form a coherent whole. All the parts are necessary.

Attitudes (a feminine dominance) seem at first glance to be rather passive. But they define a form of understanding through observation. They generate awareness that is the grounding of our behaviour and, in this way, define the quality of what we do. 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 inspires and leads our whole life. Observation, understanding and awareness mean also discernment and acceptance. As an attitude that does not immediately translate into acts, it gives space for welcoming and caring. Femininity creates a space for acceptance.

On the contrary aptitudes (a masculine dominance) 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 master circumstances.

As a synthesis it is evident that the previous quality of attitude will orientate the aptitude and the whole quality of the action. It is why in a certain way feminine qualities of attitudes situate themselves “upstream”, i.e. they are rather at the source of masculine forms of action and expression.

Aptitudes and attitudes are not characterised by the same qualities and levels of impact. Aptitudes, because they are linked with action, are generally impacting more strongly and physically on our environment than attitudes. Yet 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, independently of the gender, masculinity tends often to dominate femininity when action (masculine) is not open to the source (feminine) that inspires it. This form of domination of masculinity over femininity has to be understood rather because of the deep nature of their respective essences as expressions of Yin and Yang energies, and not because of a conscious intention for domination and oppression. This is a very important point I will come back to later because it needs to be much more deeply investigated.

### **Competition, dominance and cooperation**

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

#### ***The power of giving birth vs the feeling of threat***

***The Yin 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 male, I am convinced that the mysterious power of shaping life and giving birth is perceived by men in general as a tremendous power that remains covered by mystery. One does not control what emerges suddenly out of a hidden place after months of slow preparation. I am also sure that women consider in general their own power of giving birth as a mysterious aptitude that completely escapes their own control. But it remains nevertheless theirs or seems to be theirs. Once again it is evident that the emergence of life in the woman's womb is not a power

that the woman generates consciously. It is indeed something that happens in her without her being able to master it. Yet the whole perception of wonder of this mysterious dimension of the phenomenon - whether by women or by men - is better explained by the exterior appearances of a kind of so-called "miraculous" new creation of a new being than by the real interior hidden biological process and reality of what happens truly in the womb.

In other words something mysterious happens that cannot be controlled and that brings tremendous changes. It is a hidden "power" that is evidently at the core of the mystery of life. Therefore women are perceived by men as carriers of this incredible power of creating life.

On top of that, this deep creation or transformation happens in a hidden place which nobody has access to. Is that not for any form of external established power what one would call subversion? Something that arises out of a hidden place and perturbs the established order. The new born child will inevitably transform the daily setting of its parents. Nothing can be as it was before.

Of course it is not subversive in the way we understand this word. Yet life in its essence seems to have always been perceived as out of control (in a certain way subversive) and every social organisation seems to try to bring order into what seems to go beyond what is tolerable. This does not mean that social order always represses life. It shows only that we are all fundamentally afraid of what seems powerful and out of our control; and that this arising life may be perceived as a surprise and a changing factor in our perception of security. Our fear of the power of life (Yin) is a Yang reaction of defence.

The factor of envy that the man may feel about this mysterious power of the woman is not absent either. The principal question that probably most fathers ask themselves (at least I did) - mainly

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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 deep 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.

These first considerations concern the rather physical and experimental aspects of the process, but this can be extended to the more symbolical dimensions that concern the deeper significance of such exclusion. Deep in ourselves we are all (women and men) afraid of what arises in a hidden place. Fairy tales are full of stories where children (it means us) are afraid of darkness, of forests, of deep water that symbolise the unconscious. The womb is itself a hidden place, as the seat of our unconscious is where feelings and drives arise that we do not control. Gestation and birth symbolise metaphorically these hidden movements that control us beyond what we think we are. 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. It feels like a pact between mother and child, often (wrongly) perceived as being an alliance against the father. How many men feel threatened by the more interior and intuitive energies that animate their own feminine partner?

Beyond motherhood, interiority, independently of pregnancy, represents an ability to develop one's own inner life as an invisible personal wealth that takes shape in secret, in the private inner sphere of the being. Interiority as such has always been a challenge for rationality and for the external spectator.

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, as inner maturation and not as external expression. It is why they adopt this appearance of being subversive. They do not proclaim openly what they are. Whether at the level of partnership between a man and a woman or at a more social collective level, anything that happens as hidden is always perceived as a danger. Intuition is a danger for rationality; freedom of spirit is perceived as a menace for social order; creativity seems a special gift that prepares the unexpected; mysticism is seen as subversive for official religion. 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.

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 necessarily 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 vs resilience**

***Yang is linked with strength and control of external conditions; it dominates Yin resilience that is an inner hidden force.***

I described earlier how traditionally the role of the father consists in providing the external conditions for the safety of the family and how it allows masculinity (Yang) to develop strength:



physical strength and power for control and mastery, i.e. dominance.

On the other hand motherhood calls for endurance and it is why women develop a great ability for resilience. In difficult conditions men are generally capable of great acts of courage and strength (Yang) but it is a quick reaction that is meant to have a strong impact. The reaction of women in dire conditions (Yin) is usually characterised by a powerful resistance to harsh conditions on longer term. In cataclysms women usually resist 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 basically different ways of coping with adversity and develop different modes of reaction. Here again the masculine Yang reaction is characterised by its external power (rapidity and strength) while women (Yin) show more inner resistance (long term and resilience).

It is easy to see how, because of this contrast of attitudes, the masculine power for external strength can dominate the inner feminine power for resilience. Both powers remain untouched but nevertheless one may easily dominate the other; and not reciprocally. 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 tendency to dominance translate into the masculine trend to control or override 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, as, in terms of Yang and Yin, noise overrides silence, light overrides darkness.

This tendency of masculinity to override femininity is of double nature:

- It relies first on the fear that the mystery of life awakes in us when life borne in the inner sphere is perceived as an energy that cannot be mastered easily,
- and, second, it expresses itself through the dominance of masculine strength over feminine resilience because dominance is more explicit and visible as transforming action than resilience which remains rather hidden.

This is the core of the message: the fear of the unexpected and the dominance of what is more powerful.

This message does not describe a war between men and women but it describes an inner conflict, for each of us that happens on two levels:

- on one hand a conflict, in our deeper being, between the deep energy of life that animates us (Yin) and the fear it creates in us when we feel overwhelmed by this inner power (Yang);
- and, on the other hand, a conflict between our preference for the easiest way to control this force in repressing its creativity because we want to channel it (Yang) and our attraction for accepting the challenge in a more open way (Yin).

In other words, when we (women or men) 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

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dominance of this energy, which we do not know too well, instead of choosing to let this subversive energy express itself freely. The strange contradiction is that this energy 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.

It means that our personal choice in developing both masculine and feminine qualities in different proportions consists in fact in finding our own personal balance (third term) between these two energies when they generate at the same time the two antagonistic forces of subversion and control. Balance is, here again, provided by two antagonistic “muscles”.

### *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.*

A myth is a story that explains in symbolic or poetic terms a precious dimension of life that cannot be explained in words. The Christian tradition proposes in the persons of Mary, mother of Jesus, and John the Baptist, the prophet who prepares the path of Jesus, a fascinating myth that explains very well how masculinity and femininity relate one with another and how they

are necessary partners that complement each other<sup>4</sup>. 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 because, as said, 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 natural 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. This is also what myths do. The myth of Oedipus tells us about the relationships between sons and fathers or mothers. The myth of Sisyphus tells us about the never ending of effort. The myth of Prometheus tells us about the power of humankind to control their own destiny, against or with the gods. And so on.

It is what I’m risking here myself into when I mention Mary and John as paradigms of attitudes that have to do with our topic of masculinity and femininity.

First, before I explain anything about the symbolism expressed by this myth, let’s remember the story, i.e. only the facts without their deeper meaning. Mary, a poor girl of the Jewish tradition receives the visit of an angel who tells her that she will give birth to a son who is the incarnation of God. This means dishonour for her as she is not married. Yet she accepts to become the instrument of the one who is explained to her to bring the salvation of humankind. In her humility she remains open to the unknown and declares herself ready to confront the unexpected because she trusts life and God to lead her on the path of truth.

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<sup>4</sup> I draw this reflexion out of Paul Evdokimov: *Woman and the salvation of the world*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, NY, 1994.

This reminds us of what has been said about the subversive aspect of life. 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 own. He is only the channel of expression of it. 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. These are the facts in the story (the myth).

Now about the significance of this myth. 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. This clear knowledge is preferable to the awkward and unconscious way 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 to us the truth, to teach us how to live a life that is adapted to the context and to bring us in harmony with the energy of life. This is the purpose why I tell this myth in this context.

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 and 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 feminine ability to open to the mystery (inner hidden subversive energy) that arises deep in ourselves and that teaches us about life. It tells us that the life that takes its source deep in ourselves – which can be interpreted as the apparently subversive or as the mystery of life or even as the presence of the divine in ourselves – is the true force that makes us free. We have to trust this energy that shapes and guides us.

On the other hand, John the Baptist, as the other pole that is the necessary complement to this form of understanding, is the symbol of the expression of this deeper truth. He is in the story the one who teaches the others about the message of what true life is. His role is important: First, this message about the meaning of life needs to be heard and understood by the feminine ability to listen; it is what Mary does indeed. But it is not enough; it has still to be expressed and enacted.

John the Baptist is the one who explains to the crowd what life is about. He is not only the teacher in the sense that he tells people with words what they have to understand and what they need to see but he is also the person who enacts the teaching and incarnates it by remaining the trustful and humble man he is. He

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is playing a central role and many people take him for the Messiah (i.e. for Jesus) 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 a content that may express meaning. And meaning can be truly perceived only if it can, not only be perceived, but also 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 transmitted 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 possible ways of living: either stealing the fruit, or following the path of our own growth, which allows in us the marriage of both femininity and masculinity.*

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 truth about life.

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 teaching about the dualistic distinction between good (obedience to the law) and evil (disobedience) as

if these were two equivalent forces (God and Satan as equal influencers). This is the simplified popular version which is far from being complete. It is even a very misleading interpretation.

In reality the myth tells us, much more significantly, about the distinction between true growth in our personal life and attraction for an illusory easy path. In contrast with the popular version the true meaning of this deep teaching proposes a path of liberation which consists in a process of personal or collective accomplishment where we learn to explore our inner world and to marry our feminine and masculine faculties. Let's examine these two versions in more detail.

- 1) According to the popular version the tale of Genesis is understood in a moralistic and pessimistic way: as human beings, we are bad and we all have the innate 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 when they attempt to lead us or to seduce us. This sad understanding can only generate a deep sense of destructive guilt.
- 2) But another understanding<sup>5</sup> is possible, which brings life and hope. According to this second interpretation the 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:

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5 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.

- From the Yin or non-accomplished state: The non-accomplished state is the feminine principle (represented by the woman in the tale), which is not the representation of evil (temptation) as the popular explanation goes, but is the symbol of water, of darkness, of inertia (Yin). 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 of the being which has not yet been revealed and has to be expressed. And this whether we are a man or a woman.
- To the Yang or accomplished state: The accomplished state is the masculine principle (represented by the man in the tale), which is not the good but is the symbol of dryness, of light, of expression (Yang). The light means the accomplished, not as good but as the form of what has found its own expression. This is the mature state of our own accomplishment in the expression of our vocation. And this whether we are a man or a woman.

It is important to see that the woman and the man in the story do not represent people of each gender but, each one, the symbol of Yin or Yang. As it has been said, 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 the book of 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. It is the path for the marriage of our feminine and masculine principles, the non-accomplish striving to find its own expression and the accomplished that offers this path of emergence to the light. 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 apple which is symbol for the result) before we have endured the path of growth (the process). This means that we try to get the fruit without undergoing the process of growth described above. In doing so – this is the shortcut – we prevent knowledge from growing 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

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marriage of the femininity and masculinity (unity) does not happen. We remain split (two).

By opposition to the first traditional and popular version, this second more mature interpretation of the tale shows redemption as the normal progression on the path of life. It is no longer the blackboard which is wiped off again and again, but this path 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 through our own growth; 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 that 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 that 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 that will for ever remain exterior because it cannot be assimilated through the process of self-transformation that is the only way of integration.

It is fascinating to see how the way of growth goes beyond dualism and is rooted in the essential movement of life which has certainly to overcome resistance but has yet no main antagonist. On the contrary, the way of the shortcut is based on, and

imprisoned in, the dualism of good and evil as two opposed and equivalent energies, which they are not indeed.

A humorous story by Tony de Mello<sup>6</sup> tells the same myth in very different terms: 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!”

Similarly the tale of Genesis opposes the way of the seed, which grows through a long process of self-transformation, and, on the other hand, the way of the stolen fruit, which is stolen without inner effort of inner growth.

By the way the description of the path of the growing seed is a powerful teaching in what concerns more precisely our relationship with nature and the whole universe. It shows us the path to a new form of integration into the cosmos. The growing of the seed invites us to tune, by our own change of mind, into the harmony with the universe, according to the wisdom of traditional cultures; instead of being seduced by a form of quick and illusory domination of our natural context when we need to transform it 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 (non-accomplished) in the deep of our inner being (Mary) and have to bring it to expression (accomplished) out of ourselves in order to contribute to the general process of creation that happens in the universe, in nature and in our social

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony de Mello: *The Prayer of the Frog*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, India, 1989.

surroundings (John the Baptist). We have to discover the means how to marry our femininity (Yin or non-accomplished) with our masculinity (Yang or accomplished). Neither of them is a threat for the other. Only in their right combination can they 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. Gregor Mendel is famous for having established the main fundamental laws concerning how the genes received from the two parents may combine to give shape to a new being that has common characters with its two parents but nevertheless remains unique.

The mechanisms in genetics are much more complex than what I want to retain from this example, i.e. 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 and it will help us to better understand what happens in the interactions of Yin and Yang.

Dominant characters (genes) are characters that overrule recessive ones. This means that, 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. In the following examples, the character “brown eyes” is dominant while the character “blue eyes” is recessive. This means that brown will override blue.

1) If both parents have blue eyes, they can only, each one, give a blue (recessive) character. It is not important whether this

character is recessive or not. Their own genes being both made of two blue ones, they can only provide blue characters. The child will have blue eyes.

- 2) If both of the parents have each one both of brown characters, they can only give a brown one. It is not important whether this character is dominant or not. The child will have brown eyes.
- 3) But they can give either a blue (recessive) or a brown (dominant) if they both have 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.
- 4) If one of the parents gives a brown character (dominant), the child will have brown eyes, even if the other gives a blue character (recessive). The dominant brown overrides the recessive blue.

It means in summary that a recessive character can only be transmitted if both parents give a recessive character while, in the combination of different characters, the dominant character will override the recessive one. This is the very simplified version of genetics.

Now the metaphor: 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 when the Yang correspondent remains minimum and does not override them. 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. We have said previously that masculine action often overrides feminine

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qualities. Like the blue eye gene the Yin is recessive and can still be present but it remains invisible or unexpressed in a certain way. This is of course only a metaphor and not an absolute law as it is the case in genetics.

Some examples:

- The best example of a Yin quality that is recessive is silence. Silence (Yin - recessive) can only exist when there is no noise (Yang - dominant). Any noise will destroy silence because noise is dominant and silence is recessive. In a certain way it can be said that silence will still be potentially 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.

Now more systematically, with Yang overriding Yin:

- War destroys peace.
- Hurry prevents slowness.
- Competition hinders cooperation.
- Fear goes against love.
- Light penetrates darkness.
- Rationality kills intuition.
- Yang generally dominates or overrides Yin.

Yet we can also express these simple truths in a different way when we express them in the reversed way, which 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 where energy does not stir the context.
- Peace creates a space where conflicts can be solved.

- Slowness provides time to enjoy and perceive the depth of life when rush does not put pressure on participants.
- 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.
- Although it is recessive, Yin is a necessary and precious component of the polarity-complementarity Yin-Yang.

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 from Yang domination if we do not want to lose them. It means also that Yang energies must be refrained or harnessed in order to leave more space for Yin qualities to express themselves. 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 these Yin qualities 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. This does not consist only in maintaining a space for Yin qualities. This needs also to care for the two opposed energies to combine in the most balanced proportion



that allows the best level of expression for the weaker one, yet enhanced by the contribution of the complementary one.

### *Control, oppression and protection – 5 ways*

*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 non-accomplished 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 the contribution of each other to be fully expressing themselves; this means they are not competing but they need on the contrary 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 be. 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 that this antagonism has turned into a conflict in many cases but it is certainly not the main cause of oppression of femininity by masculinity. When we become able to see the challenge of the women's liberation movement in the context of an antinomy

between Yin and Yang, and not a conflict, the feminine issue acquires a different profile and meaning and can be answered differently.

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

The first level of reaction to Yin energy 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 transform our way of life, we will discover a much deeper and meaningful way of life. This is also the myth of the garden of Eden that reveals that our true potentials remain too often non-accomplished and that we have to bring them to fruition.

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. I wish here to describe five possible ways I can observe how we tend to or may react to the antagonism between Yin and Yang.

- 1) **Control:** 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

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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 longer 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, at the root of this reaction, no conscious intention of killing this mysterious energy.

- 2) **Exploitation:** 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. 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 or vampirism 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 hidden level, psychological, emotional, intellectual or spiritual.

- 3) **Repression:** 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 status quo (the establishment). It is perceived as subversive.

Repression of femininity is always in action around us. We create noise not to hear silence that scares us by its mysterious untold content. We rush in order to escape slowness and boredom that challenge our being. 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, reified, 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; especially when we treat life (disable people, indigenous, strangers, elderly, marginal) as problems rather

than as human beings who are fully alive. There is then no major act of factual killing but nevertheless each act has this aftertaste of unconscious repression. This kind of “innocent” killing translates further into for instance our fear of 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 it 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) **Self-restraint:** Beyond fear the first degree of acceptance is just self-restraint. When we become aware that femininity is a recessive quality, we care for it to be protected and to be more fully expressed. It means that we moderate our Yang tendencies in order to leave more space for Yin qualities to arise. We restrain our desire for noise because silence allows inspiration to come to the forth. We restrain our need for speed because slowness offers a better perception of what happens. We reduce our material needs because it creates more space for spiritual perceptions to arise. We do less because we believe that being is a more essential dimension of life and that an excess of action prevents too often a deeper awareness of being.

Self-restraint, in one word, creates a protected space where feminine qualities may arise. Self-restraint is like a wall that protects this space against the intrusion of more masculine qualities. It does not mean that these Yang (masculine) qualities are negative or absent but this protective attitude ensues out of an awareness that they are too imposing – they leave no space – because of their dominant nature, by opposition to the recessive character of Yin (feminine) qualities.

5) **Cultivation:** The next degree that allows feminine qualities to thrive is, beyond self-restraint and protection, the conscious cultivation of these feminine qualities that are recessive. It means that we organise our lives in order to cultivate consciously these Yin seeds in order to allow them to bear fruit. For instance it is perceived that it is not enough to protect silence but it is also good to practise meditation to allow oneself to experience personally and discover the depth of silence. It is also the choice of renouncing the use of cars and planes because one chooses to practise slowness in all of its aspects.

Such choices are evidently personal choices that allow each one to orient their own life according to personal preferences defined by an awareness of the necessity not only to protect but also to cultivate feminine attitudes.

This choice for careful cultivation and attention may also be extended to social and collective choices met by the local community when these feminine values are recognised collectively as a treasure the community has to protect and cultivate. Of course a necessary consensus has to arise to make this collective choice a real condition for local community life. A public space of expression can be created, protected and nourished where recessive qualities can take

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root, develop and bear fruits. It is like a protected garden where the community cultivates what is most dear to the people.

### **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. But this is not enough. We have also to notice how the surrounding culture of our modern society, in general, has taught us to give our preferences to Yang behaviours over Yin attitudes.

This is a very important aspect of our modern life and maybe even of our basic human nature, independently of our culture, that we tend to constantly underestimate. Not only we are afraid of feminine qualities because they appear subversive, not only we are not aware of the necessity to protect the fragile space of expression of feminine attitudes and qualities, but we also deliberately choose what reinforces the masculine trends of our personal life and of our social behaviours. Whether women or men, completely indifferently of our gender, we feel dominantly attracted by masculine qualities and values such as speed, power, action, accumulation of wealth, domination of our neighbours, competition, desire to show off and to impose ourselves. At the expenses of Yin qualities.

For instance, as I already said, speed negates slowness, noise destroys silence. This 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 me about the mystery of life. If I choose speed, I reach quickly my destination; but this choice has made me blind to the

diversity of landscapes and people and impressions I did not notice on the way. The Yin qualities of receptivity have been cancelled by too much attraction for masculine power of control and domination. And the same can be said concerning our will for wealth, for power, for competition, for individualism.

This strong dominance of masculine values in our society is very important because it explains why it is not sufficient that the struggle for the equality of genders concentrates on what happens in family or between people of opposed genders. As an important complement to this recognition of male violence over women, our innate hidden tendency to prefer Yang values shows that the struggle for gender equity has to go much beyond the dynamic of these everyday situations. More powerfully it concerns the core itself of our culture and of everything we do. It concerns our apprehension of life as a whole, our representation of what matters most for us, and especially our fascination for means of control and domination.

I have earlier mentioned rape as a representative attitude of how we lack any consideration for nature or the unfathomable depth of interiority; and how consequently we exploit these gifts of life without respect, without restraint, as mere inert resources to grab at will. This attitude of unrestricted consumption of what we can control may well explain our unconscious form of collaboration with dominating forces. This often unconscious collaboration will also explain a fascinating mystery I will try to explain now. If it is true that gender inequity consists in the domination of men over women, I am puzzled to understand why women do not rebel more systematically. Are women docile sheep that accept to be lead to the slaughter house? Of course they are not. So why don't they rebel openly? Why did the system of male domination last for so many millennia and seems to be still so well established?

I do not mean this at a personal level, when the victim is caught in a violent relationship she cannot escape or rebel against because the partner is violent and holds her in his power. But I mean globally, when women become together aware of the situation of domination and search together for means of resistance. Women are indeed powerful in the way they experience life and how they lead their own life and are capable of resilience. This seems in contradiction with the way such an oppression of women by men still lasts. The sole condition of male domination and physical strength is not sufficient in my eyes to explain why women would accept for millennia to be maltreated. There is necessarily here a missing link.

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 this enigmatic submission more understandable. Understandable does not mean acceptable, of course. Could this explanation I propose of dominating Yang preferences not be the missing link? On top of male domination, which is an evident reality of our world, the missing link could be this determining factor of the general domination of masculine values over feminine attitudes in our society. If it is the case, we are all participants in the maintenance of the system; we are all guilty, not only men, but women too. This means that, through our choices and preferences, we maintain this prevalence of the masculine over the feminine, much beyond male dominance. The truth seems to be that we all prefer to act as male predators. At least this is the general tendency in our human society. This seems to be true for all people, male or female; and for all cultures, traditional or modern, Western or Eastern.

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 enable to detect the gender of babies before they are born. Resulting from this behaviour dictated by a clear cultural preference that favours the birth of boys over girls, one can observe that there is an 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 Pakistan<sup>7</sup>. It is important to notice that part of this disequilibrium is certainly also due to the killing of women as 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 women are actively involved in this process of selection that is very revealing of a general cultural attitude.

This is a crude way to show how we are all intoxicated by masculine patterns of behaviour in the way we give preference to what is masculine (Yang) over what is feminine (Yin), to the domination of masculine patterns of behaviour (action, speed, greed) over feminine ones. In this average trend women and men are more or less equally involved.

This does not concern only the choice of letting or not letting live girls before they are born (this is only one example among many!). This way to favour masculine values impacts in a much wider way on each of our choices. We can give an infinite number of examples that will illustrate this trend.

- For instance, when I prefer my own promotion at the cost of my colleagues, I practise the preference of competition over care; it is the same kind of “abortion” of the feminine.

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<sup>7</sup> According to statistics published by le Monde diplomatique, July 2006

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- When I choose to fly to London for the weekend I choose also to grab more than I'm entitled to, in comparison to the average world level. I refuse to consider the negative impact of the pollution and noise of my flight at the expense of poorer countries: mechanisms of climate change but also vectors of globalisation and flattening of cultural and natural diversity. This is also a form of "abortion" of the feminine.

Leaving aside the examples at larger scale, I can also easily give examples at a more mundane level of everyday life:

- I love to drive my car because I'm comfortable and it gives me a feeling of power because I love speed. A more adequate behaviour would be to remain less mobile because life happens where I am and I do not need to go anywhere to get what I believe I need. Slowness and my own 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, it shows how we systematically practise a symbolic (but effective) form of abortion of the feminine. In this recognising this tendency we manage to reach and touch the core 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, although this form also exists. It does not negate this other form of oppression. On the contrary it integrates it into a wider picture that may better describe it and propose also a broader explanation and context.

## Chapter 2: Yang dominating over Yin

In this chapter we will examine how this pattern of masculine domination and feminine recessive character, or abortion, works in many fields. We will see, because we have each of us both feminine and masculine trends in us, how we can adapt, or not, the quality of our choices in order to leave more potential of expression for feminine values. In this way we may 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.

The art of combination of antagonistic qualities seems to be the true relationship between Yin and Yang contrasts. When these opposite characters combine and become complementary to each other, they form a new unity that marries the feminine and the masculine. When this combination concerns the identity of people, it relates usually, in acceptance or rejection, to a given biological gender; but it yet also introduces many other aspects of the opposite gender.

This is not what usually happens in our society. We can observe how this form of composition of antagonistic forces is not the rule in our present practice.

- Either we identify socially with our biological gender and we accept the predefined archetypical roles we have to conform to,

- or we want to deny the existence of these too well established differences because we wish to be free from any predetermination of our personal identity.

This brings about a much stronger polarisation in gender identity. This polarisation can be explained either by what I called the recessive character of femininity (Yin) or by our general preference for Yang values over Yin qualities.

- This double aspect of the recessive character of the Yin (need for protection and second rang in choices) seems to be more or less the rule when we adapt to predefined gender roles that usually also fit a predefined hierarchy between genders.
- On the opposite, when we want to promote a form of absolute equality between both genders, the gender distinction itself seems to vanish because it is then like denied. We are freer to be who we are but our practice is impoverished because the tension between Yin and Yang loses its intensity.

Let's see in more detail how these two extreme attitudes (strong hierarchy or strong denial) cohabit in our daily life.

### Gender roles

#### Roles according to genders

***Privileges, power and preferences participate to define social roles, based on gender identities, in a whole range between conformism and exclusion.***

Role models are complex representations of the persons we may be in the public arena. The images of these roles may be simplistic – almost a caricature – but the process that generates

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them and the way they are accepted and implemented are complex phenomena.

Traditional societies have developed much nuanced definitions of gender roles. At the first glance they seem to be extreme. They seem to reserve hunting for men and responsibility of the household for women, but this simplistic appearance hides a much wider variety of respective false and real powers. It is fascinating to observe the extreme diversity of role's definitions we 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 specialisation according to gender. We would learn a lot and be inspired to change our own ways of perceiving these differences.

Because these traditional societies are our historical ancestors we have to remember that they have been the original sources of our own practice, even if our ways of life have much evolved since the origin. Some of the same values and practices remain engraved in our genes or memory. These traditional societies never remain very far. They still subsist in many ways in our social unconscious and even in geographical proximity, in neighbouring remote areas such as mountains, vast plains, deserts, forests, boreal spaces, i.e. not far from where we live. Many of them have been systematically eradicated. But is there any country where they have completely disappeared? Probably not.

Through them we share a common humanity and their practice is often a subtle combination of innate human basic needs we have forgotten. Maybe the main difference between us and them is that they do not rely on material abundance or accumulation, or on these mighty means, such as money and technology, that have deeply metamorphosed our own practices – usually imbalances –

of power and equity in modern societies; especially in deleting these contrasts that have shaped traditional roles.

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 social and intimate relationships; whether in a supportive and inspiring or in a restrictive and repressive way. From original time many of these rules subsist today that primitive human 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 simply part of our humanity, rather than be some artificial rules that our ancestors would have invented or imposed. Yet too often, through the reign of patriarchy, power relationships and intentions have corrupted these patterns. These falsified patterns need urgently to be examined and reinterpreted.

Some of these rules of specialisation according to gender can be surprisingly creative. It has often escaped our attention because the most shocking forms of oppression have diverted our attention from these creative practices. The woman liberation movement has described them almost systematically as tools of oppression – which is often the case – but some of these rules often surprisingly provide some true elements of power to women.

It is amazing for instance to see how, in many African countries, these are women in general who are in charge of selling products on the market place. It provides them with an incredible power because the products are often their own production and the women become in this way the agents of relationships on the public square, where relationships, influence and even decision



take shape. This means also that they generate and bring home the monetary income of the household, or at least part of it.

It is also amazing to see how in many parts of Saharan countries women seem to be the rulers of the home where they are all powerful, deciding about the daily routine of the family, while the man remains mostly outside this private sphere, welcoming his friends or business connections exclusively into the guest room which is the only domestic space accessible for men who are not part of the family. These feminine and masculine spheres are like two disjointed realms with clear segregation of power.

But there are also many very disturbing aspects in this specialisation according to the gender line. As they stem often out of patriarchal practices disrespect and oppression of women exist all over the world. As men are usually physically stronger, and confirmed in their predominance 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 submission or even slavery.

Gender exploitation is probably more exacerbated by a context that focuses on social stratification, on material accumulation and individual competition than by a network of relationships based on basic needs, complementarity of roles and interdependence for subsistence. This inherent violence is also probably more frequent in poor settlements of our rich societies, which are also more strongly stratified, than in rather traditional and stable settings. Compare with Amerindian tribes in the Amazon, or with the very sophisticated clans of Aboriginal people. Greed and competition combined with a divided and competitive perception of society tend to exacerbate inner exploitation and domination.

In a more hierarchical society 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 that they constitute almost a personal entitlement. Privileges become then the reasons for more privileges. We refuse to see how much these privileges twist our perception of reality and transform the interpretation we have of the world and of what happens around us. Privileges become in this way a form of distorted lens that tends to justify and reinforce our own social, material and immaterial advantages. It is true for all types of social privileges; it is the same with privileges linked with gender. They make us blind to their nature and their origin. We refuse to see what they mean.

On the contrary, a more acute sense of justice and a free capacity to look at our own position with detachment will allow us to see more objectively what is at stake, even when the situation is at our advantage. This will help us to better imagine how we may 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. And a new quality of equity and reciprocal sharing will bring more richness and diversity and width and depth for all, independently of our respective genders. This general trend is also valid concerning wealth, power, social belonging.

Concerning gender, this necessity to let go of our privileges or preferences applies also to the fact that we all tend generally to consolidate the domination of men over women and the preference for masculine (Yang) dominant values over feminine (Yin) recessive ones.

Natural dispositions and vocations linked with gender are also very much influenced and transformed by culture and social

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construct that try to reinterpret and reshape them according to modern premises. But the contrary is also true. The original patterns, ingrained in genetic or memory, can resist very strongly these external social influences by custom or ideology to freeze the definition of social roles. Our personal vocations to express our gender in our own ways may also well reshape social settings. At least they have to the potential to do so if we are aware of this possibility.

For instance women seem to be fundamentally less attracted by institutional power than men. It means, with equal chances, they would less often choose to become leaders, at least not formally as in the way men tend to practise leadership. If this 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, or that women are deliberately marginalised or ruled out. This happens also for the reason that women prefer other forms of participation and influence, rather than structural power, to foster the evolution of our communities.

### **The essence of power**

***There are not so many women in positions of institutional power as there are men. This is not only due to restriction of access but also to the nature of power women wish to exercise.***

In general women prefer to exercise a directly influential presence among people based on natural authority, rather than a lonely form of leadership based on structural power. Direct power on grassroot level is not less effective than structural power. It corresponds better to what women feel more at ease with: direct personal contact, empathic influence, more substance and less ego involvement. This fundamental difference in aspirations may explain why a woman prime minister is more often of the style of Margaret Thatcher (Yang) than of Mother

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 Yang attitudes, these positions tend not to attract women so strongly because they do not offer the Yin quality of conditions women need for being at ease in the exercise of their own expression. Probably, if government's style evolves toward more subtle forms of expression, this evolution may open many more doors for women's responsibilities on state level, especially when their direct involvement will be enabled to change radically the spirit in which leadership is understood and practised. There is still a long way to go. Such positions do not invite women to participate; and while women do not participate, these positions remain as restricted in their nature as in their potential of attraction.

The present interpretation shows that, for us all as varied samples of genders who experience life differently, our true original nature – is it gendered or genetic or personal? – remains powerfully present, even if hidden or unconscious in our genes and memory. It continues to surface in our preferences and choices; and this independently of the social external rules that aim at influencing or constraining our social profile or personal evolution. This evidently does not mean that women should not play roles of leadership. Of course they can do that as well as men, but yet preferably in a feminine way, which will certainly be a greater contribution. It just seems they do not feel so attracted by roles that go against their nature.

It is clear in my eyes, with a few exceptions, that the most famous women are not women who were in a powerful institutional position. They were rather women who had a personal authority that did not depend on official social status. This personal authority relied on special personal aptitudes or

attitudes that were recognised and respected or admired by others.

The explanation seems to me a bit short that the lack of women in powerful institutional positions can be explained by the fact women have been barred from accessing powerful leadership roles. The true explanation is rather that women are in general freer in their own nature 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 relationships between the parts. It is indeed where everything happens. In this way they are probably more adequately present in the place where power is exercised, even if this place remains like hidden and the power they exercise is not formally recognised.

Women 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, an 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?

Another aspect of gender roles is the strong impact of publicity on the models of 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.

In publicity women are generally 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!

### *Women's liberation movement*

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

This is evident, the women's liberation movement has played a fundamental role in breaking a situation of conflict and oppression. 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 ready-made 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 believe in gender freedom. This new energy has allowed to confront unjust situations, to change the power ratio between

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dominant and submissive partners. Economically and politically also it changed the way we accept that all parties and genders can be equally involved in all matters.

We have been empowered to discover new ways of living, new balances between roles, between 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.

This is in fact the breaking down of an old system or way of thinking and relating. Once the old system is gone, a vast range of new possibilities opens. It is a bit like taking away the branches and silt that create some obstacles in the river bed, like braking a small natural or artificial dam and allowing the flow to run more freely. The river becomes wilder and may well run over its edges.

This is well-known as the movement of the pendulum. It goes from one extreme to the other, by reaction or compensation. It is the observable case that the liberation from strong social constraints usually releases extreme counter-reactions. To avoid to be caught in such reactive movements, we need to be aware that any movement of liberation, if it wants to be fruitful, has to establish its own limits not to fall into the opposite extremes.

This is a mission of self-restraint that is meant to provide the right balance and define the limits of the new field of action and invention. Before liberation there was a very well-defined system with its own strict limits. After the breaking down of the old system there is an open wilderness of any possibility. It is difficult for the protagonists to find where the new limits have to be established in order to find the new balance of creativity. These new possibilities are new and still unknown. They need to be explored and discovered at new. This concerns the new form

of freedom, how to be truly creative yet without being drowned into the infinite of endless possibilities.

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 dissolve ourselves, with this newly reconquered power, into fictive new roles and attitudes that are empty of content, or destructive of our deepest nature.

Natural limits are by essence inbuilt in our human condition. We experience them in daily life, as limit of physical or psychological resistance, limits of flexibility and adaptation, limits of strength and imagination. In a similar way nature cannot provide more resources than it can renew. Men cannot give birth. Individual freedom should not inflict hurt upon others. Matter itself has its limits of plastic resistance. Laws of nature impose their rules. As we see, these limits are very varied. They are of very different natures but they are nevertheless all parts of our daily life experience.

The difficulty of the liberation movement, once the barriers have been thrown down, consists in discovering how we may find in ourselves enough mastery and awareness to be able to identify these natural limits, to recognise them as limits and to accept them. Our awareness is essential to prevent us from getting lost into no-man's-land.

In fact freedom as we understand it is often an illusion that calls us into fiction, into illusory developments that exist only in our heads, rather than remaining well rooted in reality. 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 just be an inversion of roles where oppressors lose their power and oppressed people become the new oppressors.

Rather than rejecting limits, freedom consists in the recognition of the immanent order. This immanent order is not an abstraction or a manmade order. It is not an ideology, and it is therefore essential to distinguish this immanent order from what we intend to do or believe as human beings. This immanent order is a structure that exists in the cosmos or in nature. It is why it is said to be immanent. It is something one cannot change. It is like the movement of the planets around the sun, or like the law of gravity. It represents an order we cannot ignore, or if we do, we will suffer. If I ignore gravity I hurt myself. This is not an abstraction or an ideology used to justify the restrictions imposed by a third person onto my freedom. It is reality.

Recognising these innate limits constitutes the real and authentic practice of freedom because it encompasses the faculty to recognise and accept what is, as it is, and to feel at ease even when one does not control this external natural or social reality or even the behaviours of 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 the ability 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 the movement was too much focused on the breaking open of so many possibilities. It has opened the necessary way to this further recognition of the new field of action that has still to come. The breaking of the barriers

is the first stage of re-appropriation of our own rights, of our own responsibilities and limits. Before we identify where the natural limits truly are, we need to remove the previous limits in order to perceive clearly the totality of our living space. But the fundamental question remains finally how to discern where these new immanent limits are.

I believe that most physical processes in nature have their corresponding energy on the immaterial, psychological or spiritual level. For instance gravity is very physical. It makes these laws of nature visible and understandable. It rules the way a physical body (e.g. a stone) is attracted by the mass of another (e.g. the Earth). Gravity is perceptible each time a stone falls onto the Earth. And we experience it also with our own body. Thanks to gravity we remain on the ground where we stand and do not start floating in the air. Gravity keeps us grounded. It is the law of attraction. And in this way it has its parallel on the immaterial level. Attraction translates into love. This is not the attraction of physical bodies but of minds and hearts, although the physical dimension still remains present in sexual love. But love is more than sex. Attraction concerns the whole being. It is an attraction of the feminine and the masculine, but it is also an attraction of the Yin and Yang to form a new form of unity, based on complementarity. As we are all different, there is always a form of complementarity between us. The true expression of marriage of the Yin and Yang is love.

The law of attraction reveals the immanent order in the field of attraction. We find again here the metaphor of the magnetic field where we situate ourselves between the respective influences of many poles of which energy we have to combine to find our own personal path. This field teaches us also where the limits are when it reveals the nature of its immanent laws. It is essential to distinguish these laws and to respect them if we want to live an authentic life. If not, we are condemned to float in no-man's-land

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or, worth, in a fiction we create. Nothing prevents us from living in virtuality. Especially in our modern urban world that has been reshaped by the artificiality of market and technology. Nature has vanished from our sight, which was the true teacher of these immanent laws because it made them visible. As we have lost this teaching our role consists in resisting the illusion of virtuality and in remaining rooted in reality.

I believe the women's liberation movement has remained stuck in a gender conflict that it identified as the relationship between men and women. Men were the oppressors and women the victims. And, because it remained stuck at this level, it did not investigate the vast field of gender cooperation where the immanent limits of the new conquered attitudes and aptitudes are to be found.

For me the true explanation how to progress in depth is rather to be found in what I have already explained with the recessive character of feminine qualities and our constant preference, for Yang qualities. This consideration seems for me to better define the true field of necessary action and its real immanent limits.

### Gender specialisation

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

I have already examined this function of specialisation according to gender lines. But I wish now to come back to this in more detail. In traditional societies there is no unisex procedure as there is in our modern world. As Ivan Illich<sup>8</sup> says, when I see far away 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 the possible 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. By contrast, in our urban society, we become interchangeable, all of us, women and men, like the identical cogs or 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 justify an oppression of women by the patriarchal system. This is not completely wrong but it is certainly very incomplete. It is very healthy to remain aware of this form of negative discrimination that uses gender to create false hierarchies. But it is urgent that we become also aware how the expression of our diversity of personalities and gifts gets systematically squashed in the name of productivity, precisely because we reject the distinction of roles according to gender.

We need to see that this standardising force, which destroys our own personality and our possibilities for expression linked with our gender or personality or uniqueness, is certainly another aspect of the illusion of emancipation for women in our modern society. In most cases women have to mimic masculine attitudes in order to perform, and this is perceived as a form of emancipation. But it is not.

By contrast 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. It does not entrap us; it creates potentials that we have to interpret in our own ways. We too often forget that difference, when it is

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<sup>8</sup> Ivan Illich: *Gender*, Pantheon Books, NY, 1982

rooted on solid ground, resists uniformisation and becomes source of originality, of personal creativity.

At this stage it is important to establish a few clear distinctions and a few main considerations concerning gender issues.

- The first point, as we have seen earlier, is that the vernacular way of life includes all possible activities in an extremely varied diversity, from farming to building, from raising the children to celebrating marriages, from repairing the tractor (when they have one) to felling wood; and the list never finishes. This means that this extremely wide range of activities requires a vast range of diverse skills from the same few people in charge. The vernacular worker is in fact a generalist who knows a little bit about everything.

In this sense it is evident that there is a need for 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, as it has been already shown. It is in a certain way imposed, but it can also be chosen. And this is where our creativity relies. This does not mean that one gender (he) will never contribute to the specialised field of the other (she); it means only that he will remain free to cope with other responsibilities while she will be responsible for her own field of competence. It is in this way very liberating. 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, i.e. the uniqueness and creativity, 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. Out of this difference the differentiation of roles and responsibilities ensues as I have already described. This form of specialisation does not exclude the other from participating in activities outside his/her specialisation. It just offers better focus and performance. Deep biological differences 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 because it is our personal wealth.
- As a reminder I repeat here that 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 or originally free from these patterns. Each one does what he or she has to do, without comparing it with what the others do.
- 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

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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 in sometimes repetitive gestures is better than caring in one's own way 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 evidently exist in traditional societies too, but they do not ensue out of work conditions or because of the nature of the work done but directly out of social stratification and accumulation of power and wealth. The best tasks will be then reserved to men and hard work will be given to women when there is a dominance of one over the other. 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. This power translates into a specialisation of the underdog or the slave for harsh and effortful tasks. Stratification generates "negative" specialisation and not the reverse. Traditions and myths will inevitably be formulated to 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 traditional society our modern urban society denies gender differences and practises a kind of unisex pattern. Everybody is meant to be able to do any task. The gender difference yet remains because women get a lower wage than men for the same task.

In principle 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 and especially that any specialisation along the gender line should not foster a hierarchy between gender roles. This is what they call freedom from social oppression. It makes partly sense but it is also a fiction. Although we do not live today any longer under the influence of nature, we have yet become highly specialised. But this happens according to skills and trades for economic reasons. Professionalization is the new hierarchy that defines the income. Specialisation happens because of higher requirements linked with higher level of technology and know-how for each specialised task. It does not ensue out of the extreme variety of tasks as in the vernacular model, but out of the high technical specialisation of our trade system. Instead of knowing little about everything, we know everything about almost nothing. And this is better rewarded.

Not only are activities no longer linked with our gender capacities but we are ever more trained, women and men, in identic ways, in order to fulfil the requirements of jobs which become ever more undifferentiated. On the one hand there is a trend for 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, that is principally for playing a role, as a cog, in an economic system. How can we in this case better express our personal skills, depending on our personal gifts as well as on gender, culture, experience, personality?



Even more sophisticated professionals such as doctors, lawyers, scientists, engineers and 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. My observations show that they do not. Why are they not trained according to their skills and potentials, and not according to preconceived patterns what this profession consist in. My earlier description of the differences between Yin and Yang has demonstrated how behaviours are influenced (not exclusively of course) by gender.

Jobs have been made poorer because they have lost their personal component. They have been reduced to a function. And this form of devaluation by impoverishment – which we forget too often – is very different from the other form of devaluation that happens according to a hierarchy of false prestige – which we denounce rightly – based on exploitation, i.e. based on the specific race or gender that dominantly practises these different jobs: higher positions for white and men and lower tasks for blacks and women!

What is yet very important is the necessity to avoid that what we can call feminine activities should be taxed differently because they are mainly practised by women. I am convinced that the gender difference plays also a role in the choice we make of our (professional) activity and the way we practise it. At the same time it remains also true that, on the contrary, it is very rich that anybody can choose any possible job, independently of their gender. There is objectively no obstacle for a woman to drive a truck or for a man to work in child care or to be househusband. What matters is how, in this case, each one does this in their own way, related to gender and personality, and not as a cog.

We have 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 we have of expressing our own personality and of pursuing our own vocation. It means that this artificial and impoverished way of life may well lead us far away from our true nature and way of being.

This is the consecutive impact of a system of overproduction that is focused on immediate profit at any price, and no longer on meaning or on the satisfaction of real needs. Reality seems to have vanished because the incredible power of technology and market to create a fiction out of our lives has generated an absurd but yet effective monster that drains our life substance. Are we destined to be alive to maintain a system that destroys us as well as nature? Or are we alive to develop human relationships and foster harmony in our local community? The former is meaningless; the latter calls us to be ourselves and develop our own skills and personality as our personal and creative contributions to the wellbeing of the community.

As already said earlier freedom is not simply the possibility to choose whatever pleases us short term. It is also the challenge to find a form of expression that is faithful to our true nature. False freedom will incite us to deny what we are. This is a danger that has to be considered as cautiously and critically as we also have to consider the danger of the conservative schematic pattern 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 reveals to us, by contrast, 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!

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And I have still a last point about the role of femininity in vernacular context. We have to remember that vernacular societies are usually much more open to the practice of Yin values and attitudes than our modern Western society that has turned pretty macho and dominant as I will illustrate it later. It is important to grasp that the vernacular way, because of its feminine (Yin) 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. These ingrained expressions of feminine (Yin) mentality emphasise by contrast how dominating and violent our modern world has become with its undercurrent anger and resentment or mentality of competition and domination. The vernacular way, as paradigm, deeply proposes another way of looking at the same world. I believe this is a very inspiring and meaningful challenge for our own necessary mutation.

We need then to look more carefully and openly on the way vernacular societies practise gender relationships. We believe they are primitive and oppress women. But it does not seem right. Or if they do oppress women it is not as translation of the vernacular mentality but simply a common characteristic to all patriarchal societies that become oppressive, independently of their vernacular character.

If not related to patriarchal mentality oppression comes rather from societies that have been perturbed by fundamentalism when it comes into the game, most often in reaction to external pressure, whether past colonialism, neo imperialism, forced westernisation, invasion or intervention by a dominating power. The radicalisation under Poll Pot or the Talibans were driven by long years of Western domination (40 years of Vietnam war or 20 years of occupation of Afghanistan) and by a will of resistance which basically has its positive liberating energy,

although it translates awkwardly into extreme violence and destructive radicalism,

Remember, we talk here in general terms about the vernacular model as a paradigm! 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!

### *Gender as social option*

*Our distance from instinctive nature has allowed cultural patterns to generate social forms that may offer richer expressions of truth.*

Gender differences, although mainly fostered by nature, soon acquire a social significance that is attributed to gender by cultural patterns or choices. The different roles are marked by the different significance and hierarchy they are loaded with in the social network according to status and privileges. This is a social and cultural construct. These respective roles are also deeply reshaped according to the new logic of this emerging dominating ideology.

When roles are inevitably loaded with social significance, this can be done in many different ways, which may either bring more subtlety and equity (protection), or on the contrary more stereotypes and more oppression (domination). In most societies, although maternity is highly respected and revered, femininity has become a form of second range status, not because of what it is intrinsically, but because of twisted interpretations. This is what leads to the oppression of femininity for the reasons we have described earlier. Oppression comes from the social interpretation and not from nature.

These social patterns (or twists) generally try to justify a domination of a category of people (according to gender, race, class) over the other part of society (e.g. women, blacks,

workers). In this case the social interpretation of differences generates a pure social fiction when it tends to develop artificial settings based on social domination that come in conflict with our true nature of equal human beings. But, on the contrary, this systematic social interpretation of differentiations may well also choose to redress existing social inequities that have resulted from the first interpretation. It can then be a corrector that protects the weak and makes the strong more responsible.

This is the true potential of social awareness. It can go one way or the other, make free or oppress. Because the social interpretation of gender is purely social and does not have to respect main trends established by nature, it can either generate a better harmony in protecting weakness or it can also invent virtual forms that have nothing in common with nature. Social interpretation seems in this sense free of natural determinism. It is therefore very creative but, precisely because of this freedom, it risks also inventing a fiction that leads to dreadful distortions. Many examples of past history have shown how fiction adopted by many people can become so powerfully destructive. It nevertheless does not take away the true potential of social interpretation, which remains fascinating.

For instance in Australia it is custom for men to be with men and women with women. At a party or barbecue genders are almost clearly separated, almost as much as it would be the case in Islamic traditional cultures. This seems to be a habit that suits everybody. This explains why there are very little exchanges between genders. They almost live separate lives, except in the family and at work. The less there are exchanges, the more people seem to meet preferably with people of their own gender. Each gender is then less accustomed to relate with the other gender.

Consequently the gap increases. And the sources of conflict also develop when one has less opportunity to live with the other gender, to relate truly and respectfully, being aware of the rich potential of such differences and contrasts.

Sexuality plays then a role that becomes stronger in the ways both genders relate with one another, but according to a form of simplification of what sexuality truly means. Sexual love tends to be reduced to having sex.

Consequently of this degradation of gender relationships, it seems considered as antagonistic to relate with the other gender, and on the other hand it seems a free choice to be with people of the same gender.

Then the question arises: is nature – which distinguishes genders – important in that matter? Or is there free choice in gender relationships? Is nature the decisive factor? Or is it social interpretation? And finally: can one choose one's own gender, if it is simply a social construct?

In its positive role the social construct has to propose a path of evolution that corresponds to real characteristics of our human nature. If not, evolving in social setting that remains well protected by the artifices of modern comfort (technology and market), it may engage people who suffer in their identity onto a path that leads nowhere, onto a path of illusion and fiction that relies only on short term pleasure and game. But life is more serious than this; it has to respond to our deepest needs in our search for our true self, and not for a fictive profile of a social nobody that may look pleasant but reveals to be an empty windbag. Being is a serious challenge that cannot be avoided. We all need to be true to ourselves. And the social construct that guides us has the precious responsibility to lead us on a path of liberation, not of treachery fiction.

## Gender as identity

### Gender as natural expression or social construct

*We have to find the right balance between the natural determination of gender and its social or personal interpretation.*

In my interpretation and attempt to practise the right balance between masculine and feminine, or between Yang and Yin, it is important to examine how far gender can be a social choice. As said in the precedent comment, our social construct is able to generate a more subtle interpretation of gender than it is defined by nature at its raw state. This means that culture may bring nuances in the way we interpret the natural distinction of gender. It brings flexibility. On one extreme, gender can be accepted as defined by nature (women give birth, men generate). But on the other extreme, gender seems, in our modern society, to have become the object of a free choice. This would mean that I can choose whether I am a man or a woman and whether I want to be in intimate relationships with a woman or a man. Or, in other words, is nature all-powerful to determine this distinction or is there some flexibility for play? And if there is, how far away from nature can we go?

In order to be well understood in what follows, it is important to say very clearly that many people are born in a body of one gender (e.g. woman) and feel nevertheless to belong to the other gender (e.g. man); people who feel they have a body which is not completely theirs because it does not reflect the gender they identify with. Even very small children have this feeling and ask to be identified with the other gender. On the progressive scale between Yin and Yang, they feel that their body situates itself more at one end of this scale and their personality more at the other end. Like any other person they belong to this progressive

scale but it happens for them that their body is somewhere else on this same scale and this discrepancy brings in them conflict with their own personality. They feel then attracted to people of the same gender as their body feels like. This fact is part of nature as much as other gender relationships are also part of nature. This is, once for all, the starting point and the underlying truth that will accompany the following considerations.

Same gender relationships have been the topic of numerous debates in the recent past decades. It has been also the object of a strong struggle of LGBTQIA+ people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and + for the unknown other possibilities) to reconquer their rights. This is a great success of the last past years. More important even, it allows same sex couples to thrive, and this is essential. But this debate has also been very confused because, in my mind, it has tended and still does tend to mix in one pot very different dimensions of this same question.

First of all, the right of LGBTQIA+ people to be recognised in their difference, as well as their right to be fully appreciated for whom they are, are both essential. Yet it is important to see that, in the debate, the desire to recognise them fully has often prevented us from asking the right questions because the fact of asking these questions could have been interpreted as an opposition to their right to be who they are – although it was not. It has been seen as politically correct to erase the questions.

I will try here to distinguish these different aspects of this debate that have been too often mixed, confused or hidden. There are indeed different levels in these issues and it is important to consider them in clear terms. I believe, they can be described as the following:

- 0) The right of LGBTQIA+ people to exist and to live openly in a same sex relationship. I will not examine this statement as it is an evidence for justice.

- 1) The question how far gender is determined by nature or as a social construct or a personal choice. And how far nature and choice can combine, with which degree of flexibility.
- 2) The form of union that is suitable for LGBTQIA+ people and they are entitled to. How far it can be only tolerated or on the contrary confirmed and supported by institutional forms.
- 3) If children are involved as children borne or cared for in same sex unions, what are their rights and what does it mean in terms of responsibilities or constraints for the parenting same sex couple.

### 1) Essence or experience

*There are probably two main possible causes to same sex relationships: 1) a discovery of one's own essence, or 2) a negative experience in heterosexual relationships.*

The question 0 about the rights of LGBTQIA+ people has been answered here above without ambiguity (point 0). Same sex relationships are a reality that needs and has the right to be lived openly and even receive the blessing of society. Love is here the only key. In this aspiration for shared love there is no difference of value with heterosexual unions.

Then comes the question 1: how far is gender a social or personal choice?

In our Western world, the difference between genders seems to be blurred or of less importance, probably because we live in a world far away from the form of gender specialisation imposed by the high polyvalence of tasks and our perceptions are also strongly influenced by the form of unisex pattern of behaviour, production and consumption we experience in our everyday lives. In this way gender seems to become a question of personal

preference as if it were completely disconnected from any context. Are we free to choose our gender as we choose the clothes we wear?

In my own surroundings I can observe how many women (some men also but more rarely) have taken refuge in a same sex relationship after a hurtful experience in a heterosexual marriage. These women understandably find in a feminine friend some tenderness and intimacy they did not find with their previous male partner. This happens especially if the relationship in a precedent heterosexual marriage has been conflicting or violent. I understand well the wish not to repeat this negative experience and to look for other better conditions.

The question in this case of bad experience with the other gender is not the adequacy of same gender relationships but rather how the two genders have great difficulties to relate harmoniously with one another in our society. The real cause of the change to same sex relationship, in my example, is not the discovery of a new identity (although it could also be) but rather the conflicting tension between men and women - in the previous marriage in particular, or as a pattern of gender relationships in general.

Visibly there is, especially (but not exclusively!) in Anglo-Saxon countries, a major problem in the way relationships between both genders develop and are experienced in daily life, as I described it about barbecues in Australia where genders come together as two distinct groups of people. This preference for relating to the same gender is evidently more a cultural than a natural trend. Especially when one compares with what happens in other cultures such as South America or Southern Europe. Exchanges between men and women in daily life are, in these other cultures, more central to daily experience. Their intensity is much higher and offers many more opportunities to develop into positive patterns.

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As a humorous comment, we can mention the short article published in the Guardian. The journalist described what she had observed in the way genders were behaving one with another when they were having some good time as a couple, mainly in restaurants. She counted how many times one physically touched the other in one hour. As I lost the precise reference I do not remember the details; but roughly it looked like this: In Britain it was 0, in France maybe 25, in South America 160 times in one hour! This tells a lot! And it is also amazing to notice that it is a woman who wrote the article.

Remember well what I try to do here. The present book attempts to describe how the lack of femininity in our western society has generated false relationships of power and oppression and has prevented the complementarity between genders to be a source of creativity. This means that the problem is precisely in the quality and modes of practice of relationships between Yin and Yang, between both genders, more than in the form of a personal non-identification with one's own gender.

It would then be a pity if same sex union would be just an escape that would avoid the true problem of how men behave in relation to women in their intimacy, and reciprocally. The strong tension or even absence of mature and deep exchanges between genders is obviously a cause of profound disruption that prevents harmonious relationships between men and women, on all levels. It impacts even on the quality how members of parliament interact one with another. It shapes even the way our countries are governed. And this main handicap in gender relationships has nothing to do with same sex relationships.

The evident conclusion of these considerations is that we need to do in our society what we try to do in these pages, i.e. to readjust the balance between recessive Yin and dominant Yang. We are gifted of a gender at birth. The true question is how far we may remain rooted in this initial nature and how far we may at the

same time draw out of culture some help to enhance or transform what has been given by nature. The solution, whatever it is, must be linked with these two poles: between nature and culture. It has to include a reference to each of these two poles and our personal choice has to relate to both dimensions.

We learn from the environmental crisis that our disdain for adapting to the laws of nature has broken our true belonging to the land and the universe; because we have found refuge in an artificial bubble of protection and illusion mainly generated by technology and market and ideology. Gender is obviously one of these most important dimensions we have too lightly neglected. Not so much physically (we seem still good at making love and enjoying it) but in terms of subtle content: what does it mean to be a woman, feminine, Yin? What does it mean to be a man, masculine, Yang? What does it mean to practise Yin and Yang attitudes, independently of our given gender? And this on the progressive scale of Yin and Yang that calls for the third term of balance.

Then heterosexual or same sex relationships are just different ways we may choose to express ourselves. Nature yet seems to favour complementarity of genders as it is the fundament for procreation but also, basically, the most direct path to the marriage of Yin and Yang.

### **2) Marriage, union, vocation, love**

***It is essential to allow union for LGBTQIA+ but it does not need to be done in the same terms as for "straight" marriages. It is different.***

The question 0 was about the rights of LGTBQIA+ people to develop other forms of relationships. The question 1 was about the way we relate to nature or to essence (with the help of the

social construct). We come now to the question 2 of the debate that concerns the adequate form for a same sex union.

This point concerns the confusion in the debate that it is considered normal to call a same sex union marriage, in order to show a form of equality between same sex and other gender unions; and not to have LGBTQIA+ people feel they were treated in a different way, in a lesser way, from “straight” people. I am convinced that one can attribute fully equal values to different types of relationships and call them by different names. Love is not exclusive of one form of relationships: I can have love for my partner (whatever gender he/she is), for my children, for my parents, for my God, for my country, for my pet or even for my goldfish. These are very different forms of love. Therefore they are not all relationships necessarily suitable for what is called marriage! Humorously I can say: I do not want to marry my goldfish, or I do not want to marry my God.

- If I become a monk, it is by love of God, but I do not call this relationship marriage. I would rather call it vocation or ordination, or something similar.
- If, as a man, I marry the woman who will become my wife, it is what one has always called marriage and there is a clear understanding that this form of marriage is linked with the possibility of creating a family and giving life to one’s own children. This is only a potential but this is also a reality that traditionally marriage, raising children and forming a family are narrowly linked and interdependent experiences.
- As in the precedent cases, if I am in relationship with someone of the same gender, it is a relationship of a different order, although also based on the same kind of love, and equally real and respected. Because it is different in its essence, even if the love energy is the same, it should not necessarily be called marriage but it can be for instance

called union, or something similar. This distinction of label is not meaningless because the reality of marriage is related with the potential existence of children whose birth, presence and care are directly (naturally and traditionally) related to the form of marriage. More about this later.

The conclusion is here that we can have different words and forms for different types of relationships and unions, and yet consider them as equally respectable and positive. Differences can of course generate contempt or, on the contrary, equal admiration and fascination. It does not depend on the word used, but on the attitude of each of us.

In conclusion we can say that different terms represent different realities that can adopt different forms and different meanings. I feel this nuance is very important because it offers also to same sex couples the possibility to develop their own patterns of relationships that do not need to be modelled on the patterns of heterosexual couples. Difference remains difference. Of course this difference should not be used to create hierarchies of values that would reject people because of the label they have been attributed.

### **3) The rights of children in same sex unions**

***As it does not flow from nature, the integration of children in a same sex union implies responsibilities and explicit constraints or obligations for the couple.***

If a same sex couple wants to adopt children or, more probably, have their own children from their own genes, they are faced with a difficulty that usually does not belong to marriage. They need a third person as genitor or surrogate mother to be involved in order to make the birth possible. The union will then involve – of course at a very different level - a third person. This constraint

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must be openly recognised and needs to find a legal form (or at least a personal commitment of the couple) that assures that the interests and rights of the child are recognised, protected and cared for. This is not only the case for practical aspects of feasibility (practical fertilisation); but mainly for the essential reason that the child has a fundamental right to know who his or her father and mother are (both biological and caring parents), especially if the child grows with two same sex people and the third necessary person is not visible, or even hidden. This issue is not different from cases of artificial fertilisation in heterosexual couples. The rights of the children to know their biological parents remain the same.

This third person is evidently not involved in the same way as the two partners are. But his/her role is nevertheless essential in the generation of the family and he/she will be an important agent in the life of the child, even if remaining completely ignored, hidden or unknown in the daily experience of the child. This means that, in case children are involved, the same sex union, by contrast with marriage and similarly as for adoption or artificial fertilisation, involves then this third part that should be clearly and officially known and formally recognised in the union.

We all know that genes define not only the physical form of the body but also transmit some characteristics which can be considered as acquired or cultural. One says even that genes can be influenced by the past experience and life conditions of the one who transmits them.

As in case of adoption or artificial fertilisation or same sex couples, the child practically happens to have three or four parents: the biological ones and the ones who raise him. The child develops then at the crossing of these three or four influences. This process and need for the child to know his

biological parents take even more meaning when the parents involved are from different cultures, nations, races, belongings.

Later, when he is in age of investigating these subtle questions of origin and belonging, it is important that he has the means to try to better understand what has fostered him. Of course it is complex and not easy to grasp. But the process itself is vital for the mental health of the child and it must be allowed and supported, if possible even accompanied or even guided by an adult who can understand the nuances of this necessary approach. The question is always delicate to know whether it is suitable for the child to meet these biological parents or not. It is where guidance and accompaniment are necessary.

Now, let's go back to the debate in general about LGBTQIA+ and same sex unions. In considering these few points we examined above we see that their non-explicit absence in the debate about same sex unions has so far prevented the debate from being complete. We can see that the question of gender cannot be reduced to a personal choice for convenient reasons but that it has to remain linked with all aspects of gender, both in its natural origin and social interpretation, and with all its implications, especially linked with reality and necessary conditions for harmony for both partners and for the wellbeing of children too. Each time one has to force nature to adapt to social conveniences or to egoist preferences, there is the danger of a fiction. Our will to be "free to choose", in an illusory form of so-called freedom, is nothing else than an escape from the reality of life.

And there is another permanent feature in this debate. Nature is not the only factor because social factors become ever more preponderant in our modern society. As we live as a community of human beings, we need to find the right interpretations and the right ways of expressing what gender truly means. Gender is like life: it needs to be integrated into a wider vision of what life is



about. It needs an interpretation but any possible interpretation is not valid. Truth remains the leading force. How do we refer to truth?

I have noticed in some of my gay and lesbian friends that, probably because they could not live out their love as they would have liked to, they had developed an incredible way and depth to extend their capacity for love to a much larger experience, much beyond a sexual or even a personal - too often exclusive - relationship. This wider and deeper ability translates into a form of universal and all-encompassing love that has opened them to the true sense of what love is at the core of the experience of life.

It is then no longer only *eros* (love as attraction and basic life energy) or *philia* (friendship as selective love), but it becomes true *agape* (universal and fatherly / motherly love that does not make distinction between persons).

I feel for instance that James Baldwin<sup>9</sup>, the black American writer, is of this type, in his deep search for true inclusiveness that recognises each one as a unique being, independently of race, culture, class, gender, religion. Such people are very precious gifts for our society, as rich messengers who teach us to live a better life in which compassion becomes the leading energy.

### **Gender and self-obsession**

***Identity according to gender has become, in our Western rich society, such a powerful and all-invading worry that it often becomes destructive as a form of self-obsession.***

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<sup>9</sup> Read for instance his essay, James Baldwin: *The Fire Next Time*, Penguin Books Ltd, 2007.

Having expressed all what I wrote above, I need now to share a personal impression.

First I must say that I personally do not feel very much challenged by the way I experience or express my own gender because it is of no significance for me. I am who I am, in a way that is as much linked with or also independent of my gender. I can say the same of what concerns my relationship with the physical features of my body (size, proportions, colour, look) , or with my race, my country of origin, my mother tongue, my spiritual beliefs, the state of my mind, my past evolution, or so many other aspects which made, and still make, of me who I am. They are far from being perfect, but they constitute the effective components of my being and I use them as tools with which I do what I can at best. They are given and they form the material with which I have to build my life. They do not define who I am; they are only bricks of my constitution. And I have queer friends who do the same: they just do this in a different way in what is related with gender but it is not a problem for them either. It is just the way we do things. It is why I do not feel in general very much concern for these gender issues.

Nevertheless I feel very much concerned by any form of oppression that prevents people from being who they are, gender being sometimes one of the reasons, but only one among many others. So many more people are oppressed because of their race, of their tribal belonging, of their religion, of their social position, of their ideology.

I'm also aware that the liberation of gender is a privilege of mainly Western countries and that it is not the case for so many other societies where moral habits and discrimination and falsified forms of religion still condemn any behaviour that is not considered as "the norm". This is evidently a vicious circle because "the norm" defines behaviours that prevent the norm

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from evolving. In the West also there remain some strong reactions of antagonism to queer people.

Feeling, as I do, pretty at ease with my gender and origins – which are not difficult to accept because, as a white male, they put me in a rather privileged position in our society – I am struck how much importance is given today to gender identity in societies like Australia or Europe that have freed themselves from this form of oppression or from defining the norm in a strict and exclusive way

There are now in the West no more two genders – as it is scientifically the case in physical terms – but there seems to be as many genders as there are possibilities to express them, as many as there are letters in LGBTQIA+, with an infinite possible extension (the sign +). It is what one of my friends humorously but tenderly calls *the alphabet people!* I respect these many ways because they precisely constitute the purpose of life. But my question is why to make such a fuss about it.

Why for instance is the designation “non-binary” so essential? How can one define one’s identity by not being something? And what about each of these letters? Is this not an excess of self-centeredness, or even self-obsession that triggers such complex denominations. Why not simply be?

Race like gender is given at birth. If I am white, I can say: I want to be black. But will it solve anything? What can change my life is rather the way I live with my original race and how I express it. No label is needed. I just need to enact it. I mean this in a context without oppression.

Changing one’s race does not bring any solution. What needs to be addressed is the oppression or contempt or rejection or hate because of race or gender or ways to express one’s race or gender. And it is precisely what the liberation of gender has done: it has eradicated – at least in principle – the cause of

oppression, contempt and hate for people who experience gender differently. It is done. We can leave it behind us and need now to do the same with race.

Of course these changes in behaviour and judgement have still to be more thoroughly integrated in public culture – and this takes time – but the decisive step has been implemented. I understand also that many people, who do not feel recognised for what they are, need more time to find their own way. But this does not depend on exterior factors, but rather on finding one’s own way. Inventing many words does not change the issue. And making a fuss over these many possibilities either.

In order to better illustrate what I try to say here, I will take the example of language. As some people do not want to be identified with a gender, it becomes more and more difficult to talk or write. And language has to become strictly inclusive. Some want to be identified as “they”, because, in English, it does not define the gender. But using *they* does much worse. It creates a kind of plural or multiple being – with many heads? – that does not seem to be well integrated or unified or forming one whole. The being seems then to be split in many entities. It is not what one wishes to express about someone who feels belonging to the other gender, or even to neither. This subterfuge of *they* works more or less in English because English is almost not gendered, except the use of *he* and *she*.

In French or other Latin languages, we have gendered pronouns – *she (elle)* or *he (il)* in singular, but also the pronoun *they (elles, ils)* in plural is gendered. And the adjectives are gendered too – beautiful (*beau / belle*) – and nouns are gendered: actor can be either *actrice* (f) or *acteur* (m). Hence the all-inclusive language becomes a nightmare.

One can go even further and consider languages (like Hebrew or Arabic) that have even gendered verbs, i.e. there is a feminine and a masculine form for each verb, depending on the gender of

the subject. For instance, if we try to express this nuance with English words but Arabic or Hebrew rules, it would give the following. Let's say the letter *a* being the feminine addition that expresses the feminine form of the verb, as it does in Hebrew or Arabic. In the masculine form you would then say *he is* but in the feminine form you would say *she is-a*. And the same not only for verbs but also for nouns, pronouns, adjectives. It means that, in order to have an inclusive language, one needs to have each time a double pronoun, a double noun, a double adjective and a double verb. It creates approximately the following incomprehensible amalgam (using here all languages as mentioned above): instead of writing *he is a good actor*, one gets as inclusive something like this: *she/he is/is-a a beau/belle actor/trice*. You will agree, this is neither very explicit nor easy to read and understand. In others words one has to repeat each sentence twice, once in the feminine form and a second time in the masculine form. And maybe even a version for each letter of the *alphabet people*. Evidently it becomes absurd.

If we want absolutely to have this inclusive language despite the gendered forms of words, there are two very simple alternative principles that could offer a very practical solution if they were accepted and generally applied. First that each one would speak using one's own gender as the form of expression, using *she* if she is, or identifies as, a woman; or using *he* if he is, or identifies as, a man. The second principle could be to introduce a code similar to “ ” or ( ) or [ ] that would officially signify “inclusive language”, as the sign “ ” means “quotation”. Of course such a system cannot be perfect because it will not satisfy the needs of each category of the *alphabet people*. But it would simply allow the expression that the writer or speaker cares for these people and tries to include them. What more can we ask for?

These last considerations will certainly exasperate many readers. I'm sorry to disturb their quietness but I'm looking here for what

matters most in life – evidently in my own subjective way. I deeply believe that all the energy that we spend talking about these exaggerated gender identity issues would be much better invested if we would rather debate about the many other forms of oppression such as race, or nationality, or tribal belonging, or cultural identities, or discrimination according to beliefs.

It is in my mind a luxury of rich countries to concentrate so much on one's own individual gender identity, which is no longer threatened, when so many other aspects of our person are neglected? What about our level of education, our degree of consciousness, or our concern and involvement in issues that impact us all together as a society, such as climate change, the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor, the decay of our democracy, the increasing opposition between fake news and truth? These are urgent issues today.

Sometimes I feel that the issue of gender has formed an impenetrable bubble of self-obsession that is hermetically closed to these other issues, precisely because of self-obsession. The part obstructs the whole. It is not liberation. It is another form of oppression: self-enclosure.

Or if we speak more about gender, let's rather examine why there is such unease in the relationships between the two genders – I mean feminine and masculine. We have lost the balance between the two genders. And even the capacity to relate one with another. And especially how we can develop both Yin and Yang attitudes. The two genders live ever more separate lives. We do not know any longer how to relate. Let's then now examine this balance instead of being trapped in false mirror images.

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### Gender in a nutshell

*Gender is like race. There is a small physical difference that is superseded by a dominating social construct or interpretation. Yet one remains free to express one's own gender as one wants.*

Genetically races are very similar with one another. What dominates is what we have in common as human beings, i.e. our common humanity, or even our common biology. The physical difference is very minute but it concerns often the general appearance such as the skin colour which is more visible. Even if this difference is not a dominant factor in the way we experience our belonging to an ethnic group or we feel different from other people, it soon becomes a dominant factor through the interpretation that other people give to this difference.

As long one is not confronted to the difference – this is when people live with other people of the same race or appearance – race does not matter. Race starts to get its significance when the difference becomes noticeable, by comparison or by contrast, although this difference remains minor. It becomes still more significant when it fosters interpretation, especially when this interpretation affirms a hierarchy. One race is then declared inferior to another one, not because it is inferior but because the dominator wants to justify his domination. The genetic difference remains insignificant but the discourse becomes dominant. It is not the fact that is significant but the talk about the fact. And even more than the talk, it is the intention that hides behind a discourse that pretends to be objective, even scientifically based.

Gender is in this way similar to race. It is defined by minor physical differences (male or female) that get a strong social significance. In my mind the social significance becomes principally a social construct whose impact is dominant, although the difference of gender remains minor. As for race the

social construct or discourse about gender generates hierarchies that do not rely on physical objectivity but are created by the social discourse shaped by the dominant forces. Historically men have declared women inferior, not because they were inferior, but because the men wanted to dominate them. This is a social construct that has nothing to do with objective reality. It is fully human-made or I should even say in this case manmade. But of course it has a strong impact on daily life.

In what concerns race, there is no specimen of pure race. We are all hybrids because we are all the result of a mix of genes coming from different roots.

This is the same with gender. There is a physical gender function (male or female) but many ways to live the dimensions of femininity and masculinity. Between the two poles of masculinity and femininity there are all the intermediary ways to mix these two extreme characteristics, or Yin and Yang. All combinations are possible. It is the responsibility of each one to choose the way we want to behave. We can see here how there is continuity between genders as there is continuity between races.

If we accept this way of looking at the problem, the problem dissolves as long as there is social acceptance in the direct surrounding. I am aware it may create a vacuum because many define their identity through the problem. Without the problem the identity seems to vanish.

What becomes for me significant is the experience that each one has of inter-gender relationships. This becomes the dominant factor. If I had good relationships with the other gender I am comforted in my gender identity. If not I have the tendency to withdraw and turn towards the people of my own gender. This is not gender identity; this is gender trauma. And it is very different and calls for very different remedies.

What is important here is that the whole range of relationships remains accessible and potentially rich. That is what one wished to everyone: to have a wide range of positive experiences that truly enrich the person.

### **Masculinisation through history**

I have previously described how masculinity tends to dominate femininity. It is very interesting to illustrate now how this has been a general trend through the history of Western countries. This is evidently a very big topic I address here that should rather constitute the content for a whole book. I will nevertheless reduce it to a few descriptions and considerations how Yang actions have repressed Yin attitudes. My description will be necessarily simplified, Remember we talk only of general trends that never apply in all cases.

#### **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) skills over feminine (Yin) attitudes seems to be very old.

When we observe what we know of human evolution through the millennia and centuries, we may discern general trends that characterise history and the slow transformation of our Western culture. I will only concentrate here on Western civilisation because this is also the coloniser which has imposed its influence to other cultures. I would like to sketch very roughly this

evolution in the way I perceive it, and show how it favours a slow progressive increase of dominance of masculine values. This evolution happened by stages. Although there are many more stages I will only describe seven of them that, in this perspective, seem major 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 and made possible by new technologies or by new ways of thinking or forms of understanding of how our surroundings are regulated by natural laws and human interaction. This is what we could call the progress offered by each step.
- Yet this progress cannot be complete if it cannot be integrated as a new improvement into what had been practised and assimilated previously.
- In general one may observe that, on the contrary of this necessity for integration, each new 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 had been discovered as new. It seems to be an almost constant trend in our human development that we have been replacing the old by the new instead of evolving toward more complexity in integrating the new into the old; allowing more factors and dimensions – sometimes very diverse and even antagonistic - to cohabit; and trying to marry the old traditional perception with the new means.
- Particularly when technology offers new (easier) solutions, there is a tendency to simplify the new perception and

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representation of reality to the mere technical response and to reduce the new complexity revealed by the discovery in abandoning the previous form of more subtle knowledge.

- In itself it is probably a masculine trend to replace deep meaning (Yin) by new technology (Yang). Let's see how this pattern repeats itself in the seven stages I have chosen to describe as examples of trends of masculinisation.

The simplified interpretation of this evolution I propose here is focused on the masculinisation of our values, behaviours and society.

### 1) Agriculture and the loss of the book of teaching

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

The first stage of evolution is the discovery of agriculture. When human societies started to practise agriculture, they were able to abandon progressively their hunting-gathering ways of finding their subsistence and they could settle down into villages and towns. They had a better food security assured by larger quantities provided through more or less regular food production and through possibilities for storage. Both cultivation of located fields and concentration of wealth into storage constituted a restraint to mobility and nomadism and incited people to remain sedentary. 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.

It is important to emphasise the fact that this transition from nomadism and hunter-gathering was very slow because it was probably not evident whether it proposed an improvement.

Yet this apparent progress seemed soon to erase the feeling that humankind remains nevertheless part of nature and has still to adapt to its cycles and laws. Agriculture does not replace the cycles but only offers a means to take the best possible advantage of these cycles and to relatively control how they can participate in improving conditions of human life. Cycles remain principal. Through this new impression of partially controlling nature humankind lost some sense of its own belonging to nature and sense of sacredness.

The early stages of civilisation had been mainly matriarchal (Yin) because nature was the feminine goddess that was nourishing humankind. 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.

A dominant characteristic of this stage of evolution was the fact that nature seemed to be more under control. Humankind 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 mainly in the way the growth power of nature - that remained unchanged - 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.

This transformation of mentality marks a huge step in our evolution because it breaks the pattern of harmony of a whole (Yin) universe that sustains equally all species. It creates suddenly a tremendous disruption when it perceives one species (humankind) as the so-called core and centre of the whole process of evolution. Oh illusion! Out of a network of intense relationships arose the concept of illusory circle centred on humankind as the focus and the purpose of all that was. The

consequence of this change of mind is now visible in the terrible damages 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 so-called top species and nothing can oppose us, we change the dynamic of our surroundings. They are then transformed into what we want them to be and they do not reveal any longer what they are truly. Yet nature remains nevertheless the only form of expression of the natural evolution of the universe and of its own laws. In disturbing this original order and pattern, or at least its visibility, we destroy the book of nature that reveals us the true essence of life. In doing so, we have destroyed, or at least deeply modified, the fundamental teaching about life we may receive from nature.

Nevertheless we cannot change nature fundamentally. We can only change what we accept to see in it. We do not accept to see any longer that the laws of nature are based on cycles, generosity, diversity, complementarity, cooperation, subjectivity, depth, consciousness, wonder.

By sharp contrast with these laws, our western society evolves 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.

As we can see these opposition are all illustrating a conquest of Yang over Yin.

Of course these oppositions are described here in a simplistic way of generalisation but they reveal yet how far we have gone in betraying the laws of nature when we are afraid of the unforeseeable dynamic of life and we try to tame nature. Our Yang trend to control represses our Yin curiosity and sensitiveness to the mystery of life as well as the Yin nature of the environment that sustains us as a motherly figure and provider.

### **2) Aristotelianism, Scholastic and the loss of mythical thinking**

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

The next stage I want to examine happened much later. There was first the development of Greek philosophy that changed radically the way this culture and these people were relating to their environment. They started observing their surroundings as something distinct from them and asking which its essential nature was. Very roughly one could say that there were two major tendencies: one rationalist and materialist incarnated by

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Democritus and Aristotle and one more metaphysical and spiritual represented by Pythagoras and Plato.

The original stage of Greek philosophy in the fifth century BC was a fundamental mutation in the history of humanity which corresponded also to similar mutations elsewhere on our Planet, such as Buddhism in India or Zoroaster in Persia or Confucius in China. Yet Greek heritage seems later to have like vanished for a few centuries (especially in what concerns the Aristotelian way), while Neo-Platonism had influenced strongly the early steps of Christianity and was like integrated by it.

This long eclipse of Greek Aristotelian thought lasted for many centuries until the Middle Age. The second stage of evolution I want to consider here concerns rather the medieval resurgence of this movement than its radical original Greek discovery. This later stage has consisted in the later rediscovery of philosophical thinking and, in an astonishing way, especially of Aristotle and its rational approach of syllogism, at the expense of a kind of eclipse of Platonist philosophy.

It is how, in my understanding, this dominantly rational way of thinking was later reintroduced into European culture by Arabic influences (Averroes) and the Scholastic philosophy at the Gothic era. It was the time when St Thomas Aquinas restructured the whole of Christian theology and dogmas. It is fascinating to observe how he did this in the same structural way as simultaneously the architecture of the Gothic was discovering how to adapt the design and structure of cathedrals (rib vaults, columns, buttresses) to the observation of physical forces. On both levels the Scholastic was an implementation of a new way of thinking, based on observation and rationalism, which aimed at mastery of the forces of the universe, from gravitation to theology.

The progress was the new way to apply rationality as a thorough intellectual approach (a method) either as a tool that could

observe the physical world and invent new forms of building, or as an instrument of understanding of metaphysical dimensions (mainly theology). This new approach could propose effective strategies that could allow to solve existential problems, whether they were practical (stone building) or metaphysical (religion).

Yet this progress seemed in contradiction 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 emphasised 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 more antagonistic than complementary. And the new tools, because they were so well defined and effective, seemed to overrun the more subtle and fragile mythical perception, which was able to reveal a reality beyond mere practicalities.

This more rational approach certainly allowed a better control over the surrounding world, but it also neglected to integrate the precedent ways of perceiving this same world. These older traditional teachings relied principally on stories of symbolic and mythical nature, i.e. on myths. Myths are these stories which reveal the essence of the world without explaining it but only making it intuitively perceivable. The early Middle Age, especially the 12<sup>th</sup> century in France, had been very marked by symbolic thinking. Most of the buildings, and especially churches of that time (Byzantine and Romanesque), were like books that taught about the divine mystery. They used in this purpose sculpture and painting. Artistic expressions of this early time did not respect realism or perspective in a rational way as it became the case later, after the Quattrocento in Italy. They used to propose representations that were less marked by realism but attempted to describe what is beyond the visible (Yin).



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 (Yang - formal expression of structured knowledge as in the theology of the Summa Theologica by Thomas Aquinas) 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 in the Middle Age. 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) Renaissance and the loss of sacredness**

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

Soon this new ability of observing the world in a scientific and rational way transformed the relationship humankind had established with its environment. This strong mutation of perception and thinking happened more strongly in the Renaissance.

Copernicus discovered that the earth was not the centre of the Universe but just a small satellite orbiting around the sun. This was a deep revolution of thinking because humankind was no longer at the centre but at the periphery. Yet this discovery generated exactly the contrary effect. It made of humankind a

separate species that would in future believe it could master science and the observation it had of its environment. The mastery as domination provided to humankind this centrality it has lost in its position in space, on the little satellite Earth.

In this way the Copernican new understanding of the universe and the systematic observation of anatomy helped humankind to reach another stage of scientific and artistic development when it became capable of relating to its surroundings as something, distinct from itself, it could observe, describe, understand, and transform. This led to a perception of the human being 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 humankind in the universe. This was the progress.

Yet this progress seemed soon to ignore how much humankind is dependent on the whole universe for its surviving inasmuch as society started to develop an image of itself that was no longer related with the whole cosmos. The human being became a special creature that was no longer perceived as dependent on its context but seemed free to shape its own destiny. If it was positive to discover the potential that opened to the awareness of its own creativity, it was nevertheless an illusion to believe that humankind was made free to become the master of the universe.

The mystery of sacredness one feels still very present in the paintings of the Quattrocento vanished and was replaced by a strong ambition of shaping the environment according to human wishes. The ecological collapse of our present century is the best proof that Renaissance should have made a more balance synthesis between its creative power (Yang) and an humble awareness of the fact that we still belong to nature and have to adapt to its laws and respect the sacred dimension of its

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evolution and orientation (Yin). Life is not something we manage, but a precious mysterious gift that happens in us.

This mutation of mind and spirit means that humankind seems to have missed the step of integrating the traditional perception of sacredness into this new stage of better and more realistic observation. Later (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> cent.) the description of our universe developed in this rational direction and 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 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially with the theory of relativity and quantum physics, could show how this simplification was inappropriate although it remained mechanically correct.

The main change at this time is probably this new human ability for a form of self-centredness of humankind 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. The discovery of perspective in painting is a good illustration how the perception of the world became egocentric – i.e. centre on the person of the observer as if she were the centre of the world – instead of remaining rooted in an understanding that saw the world as a whole of which each one of us is only a small almost irrelevant component.

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 sentient 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 humankind

and the universe inasmuch as it proposed a new form of intellectual knowledge and material mastery to solve the problems of our connections 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 very treacherous although it was evidently very powerful. 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) Colonisation and the loss of humanity**

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

The next stage I have chosen to describe is indeed simultaneous to the Renaissance time but it is interesting to examine it separately. The development of science and the implementation of new technologies in the Middle Age (the compass and the rudder) and the Renaissance allowed the development of navigation and geography, and the discovery of new continents. Colonisation became the new trend, especially with the Portuguese, Spanish, British, French and Dutch conquests of America, Africa, Asia, Oceania. Soon these new continents became the sources of many new resources and wealth through extraction and looting. 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. The contrasting differences of these other cultures with what was already known by Westerners were so radical that it became evidently a powerful call to revisit the Western understanding of the world and at the same time 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. Highly developed civilisations were also encountered in India, China, Africa and highly evolved cultures in America and Australia. Still more challenging was the fact that Western civilisation could have learned much from these cultures in terms of philosophy and spirituality or even everyday living.

The contrast was so challenging that this progress of new encounters, with its fascinating and rich potential for a deep reorganisation of Western thinking under foreign influence, was quickly avoided and transformed into pure one-sided domination (Yang) at the expense of any possible curiosity for, or respect or recognition of, or even inspiration (Yin) by, these different traditions that had developed for millennia into deep and respectful understanding of their own environment and into very sustainable practices. And the same for these other types of empires that had accumulated an exceptionally rich millenarian wisdom (Upanishads, Buddhism, Tao, Shinto). Of course these traditional or sophisticated cultures were also far from being perfect but they had certainly their own coherence and insights.

The synthesis of different approaches between conquerors and colonial cultures was made impossible by the choice of the newcomers to exploit these new territories as if they were not occupied by equal human beings of the same humanity. Either the dominating invaders developed racist theories that tried to affirm 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) as they did in Australia. This paradoxical unilateral declaration of the inexistence of the others made it much simpler to exploit them.

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

Is it not tragic that, instead of enjoying the wealth of diversity, we need constantly to become oppressors? It is a very insidious 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, against one another, although this daily experience could be a constant wonder about what the others who are so different from us can bring to us, and reciprocally. The source of this dominating attitude is evidently fear, our own fear of what is different from what we know so well in our familiar daily habits.

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. Humankind 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.

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### **5) Industrial Revolution and loss of being**

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

The further stage of this conquest of the world by masculinity can be seen in the Industrial Revolution and its accelerated impact through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The import into the mother country (especially England) of incredible wealth extracted or looted from the colonies allowed to develop production at home (Europe). The practice of slavery in the colonies allowed the colonists to multiply the benefits from their big land estates. This produced a great part of the necessary wealth that stimulated and facilitated the discovery and development of new sources of energy (steam, electricity) and the implementation of new technologies based on these new energies. This fundamental mutation allowed a radical development of all means of production, which generated much profit and excesses in goods and capital.

The progress was made possible by the invention and use of new machines that multiplied considerably the human ability to transform matter. Yet this progress, instead of offering an improvement of life conditions for all people (Yin), has been side-tracked for the interest of the bourgeoisie elite (Yang) who was able to accumulate a huge range of power and wealth at the expense of the rest of the population (the working class).

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 linked with production and to the ideology of an increased competition between social classes and groups of interest. Instead of offering an improvement for the whole society based on the satisfaction of the true needs of everyone, it became the tool of an increased and

concentrated domination and control of a wealthy minority (Yang) over the larger part of the population that became the working class or even the starving class.

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 (Yin). It would have been indeed possible to use these new means for the well-being of all; in a spirit of solidarity that would emphasise that it is the role of a society to keep its economic forces in check; to restrict the excessive freedom of the most powerful people who have control over them and to care for equality and inclusiveness, so that nobody is left behind (all Yin). 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.

At the Industrial Revolution the law of competition (Yang) took over the genuine development of social maturity and the ability of society to choose the quality of development it wished (Yin). We just lost the sense of what matters most for our community life: nothing more than the joy of being.

### **6) Imperialism and the loss of community**

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

Out of this development imperialism ensued as a strategy to discover and intensify new outlets for products, new fields for more investments of available capital and new sources for more diversified resources for the industrial process. Colonialism and

imperialism greatly differs although they are narrowly linked one with another and have both many common characteristics.

- 1) Colonialism, which developed first, consisted mainly in European people establishing themselves in these newly conquered southern countries, under the protection of a strong military presence. They developed large estates which allowed them in general to live a comfortable life and to accumulate a large wealth in conditions of domination, exploitation and power. This wealth was exported to the mother country where it fed the Industrial Revolution.
- 2) By contrast imperialism involves rather, in a second stage, agents from the mother country who need to import resources from these countries or to invest capital in further corporations established overseas or who, in the mother country, produce goods in excess (overproduction) they want to be exported and sold to the colonised countries in the single purpose of making more profit. In this sense imperialism consists in a further grade of conquest of the dominated countries. This stage of imperialism, based essentially on overproduction, is a direct product of the Industrial Revolution. Overproduction was mainly led by the investors at home, supported by national governments and armies sent to the colonies, to reinforce or extend their presence in the colonial lands and take control of them as investors and exploiters or just as outlets for this overproduction.

The role of the nation-state is clearly different in imperialism from what it was in colonialism. The nation-state has taken shape after the Thirty Year war (Treaty of Westphalia, 1648). The concept was related to a nation understood no longer as a country ruled by a monarch but as a population of more or less same ethnicity living on a given well-delimited territory under the

authority of the same monarch. The concept of the nation-state meant that the ruling power was increasingly supported by an apparatus that had to administrate the practical problems of daily life of this precise population on the territory of the nation: trade, communication, finances, and many others. It was therefore complementary to, and slightly distinct from, the ruling function of the reigning power. The question of ethnicity was also dominant to define who was belonging to this nation, and who was not.

The French Revolution instituted later the rule of the three independent powers (executive, legislative, judiciary) and the principle of equality of all citizens as a counter-balance to the power of the elite, whether the degrading aristocracy or the arising bourgeoisie. It redefined in this way the role of the nation-state as an institution whose role was to treat all citizens as equal and therefore to compensate the possible causes of inequality. It had to care for the poor. But, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, imperialism transformed deeply this concept.

In this new evolution the state increasingly and actively was supporting main businesses in their exploitation of resources from the colonies or in the transformation process in the mother country. The Navy and the armed forces were actively intervening in the colonies as they did in India for instance to conquer the whole continent. This was the beginning of the decay of the nation-state that could no longer play its role of guarantor of equity because the action of the state was mainly aligned with main business interests or the privileges of the rising bourgeoisie as the new elite. This evolution led to the globalisation we know today, in which the state is ever more under the control of private interests.

This later stage of evolution is so much characterised by Yang values that it is difficult to imagine with which Yin values it

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could have combined if not the respect and fascination that could have arisen from contacts with so different cultures, lands and climates, and especially people in flesh and bones one would meet every day. But it did not more than it had happened at colonial time.

On the contrary, the pressure on the conquered territories increased in very violent ways. In continuation with the colonial era, indigenous populations were massacred or decimated or used as workforce or prevented from working in their traditional trades (like the weavers in India) in order to create a form of monopole in the hands of the mother country. The exploitation of slavery developed until it reached a stage where it seemed more effective to transform it into indentured work for a miserable income. Ethical considerations, especially expressed in the mother country, helped also to this transformation. Very often indigenous people were also killed by epidemics because they could not resist the plagues the conquerors had brought in under the form of new diets or many diseases or alcoholism.

Two opposed trends clearly appeared:

- the dominant trend (Yang) that is based on individualism and competition, which erase delete the importance of community,
- and the recessive trend (Yin) of any local community, which attempts to be in control of its own destiny, to become alive and to reconquer a form of empowerment for all, which would help everyone to find their own unique place and role in the local community.

### **7) Globalisation and the loss of empowerment**

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

The next stage of this evolution can be seen today in the general trend for globalisation. The richest industrial countries, which had established their own economic and political power under the cover of protectionism and at the expenses of the southern continents that they have looted, continue nowadays to act under the spell of eternal growth on a limited planet. At any price they look today for further outlets for the excess of goods they produce as a consequence of a system based on overproduction. Globalisation tends to involve far away countries into wider free market exchanges (neo-liberalism) that are meant to profit the dominant interests of this system based on the maximisation of profit. Here again there is no possible synthesis for the same reasons as previously, because we can observe how feminine values (Yin) of respect and acceptance are completely overridden by masculine values (Yang) of greed and efficiency in the name of accumulation.

In globalisation there is a struggle of the private interests (main international corporations) and the nation-state. The World Trade organisation (WTO) is the expression of this increasing power of private interests that prevent ever more the nation-state to rule over its population and national territory where it is meant to guarantee equity of treatment for all.

Globalisation is only the further stage of what has prepared the contemporary trend to extend exchanges possibilities to all human activities. This opening could be considered in a positive way if it were done for humanistic reasons and not for economic motives; and if care would be taken to allow each culture to be heard and respected in their great diversity.

But the trend works exactly in the contrary direction because it extends the commercial exchanges and the consumption of the same goods for all of us, without considering how much it answers real needs, and without regard whether it furthers our own human, cultural, spiritual development and helps us to

reinforce our diversity and 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 everything: diversity, quality, creativity. What could have been the win has become the cause of the big loss.

We are not used to link globalisation with overproduction, yet this is properly the real cause and the main motor for the development of open competition. The motivation of the capitalist system is indeed based on (over)quantities: (over)quantity of goods, (over)quantity of capital, (over)quantity of workers and (over)quantity of consumers. Nothing is measured according to needs and there is no possibility for restraint because benefits are only made possible by the addition of small profits in the maximum possible increased number of items that makes the consideration of true needs irrelevant.

To allow the law of (over)quantities to work, the 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) to yield 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).

And, far more, this economic system and way of thinking are doomed to destroy themselves. By depriving workers and consumers – they are the same persons! – of a solid income, by preventing them from getting well-paid jobs, it deprives them also from their capacity to consume which is the main basic

principle on which the system can thrive. In other words, by draining the system of its wealth through the extraction of any possible benefit (excessive profits, stock exchanges, excessive remuneration at the top), it drains the system of its blood. This is a principle of classic economics: wealth has to circulate in order to generate more wealth. When it is accumulated and stored, it drains the body of its vital energy.

The tragedy is not only the deterioration of the local economy with its huge loss in skills and traditions, or loss in the intensity of reciprocal connexions that made local life something so rich. The loss is not so much the fact – which is already in itself an unbelievable bankruptcy - that all products one can consume locally are made in China in an extremely bad quality aimed at more consumption as each good has to be soon thrown away and replaced.

The great cataclysm consists in the fact that the people who live locally, and are working usually hard to make a living for themselves and their own families, are no longer 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, through the action of our political and economic leaders, has so much exacerbated 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

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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 any longer which their priorities are. And the market machine, with its ideology of infinite growth, encourages them to adapt in the name of the illusion to find more happiness when more goods become available. Resentment grows in consequence that brings violence or extreme right-wing regimes to succeed with their destructive populist politics of hatred and rejection, which are sadly nourished by this basic inequity which is sadly a present fact of life..

### **Yin as synthesis and integration**

*These 7 stages reveal a lack of synthesis of each new discovery with heritage; a function of Yin attitudes that need to be protected.*

This description in seven stages is evidently short and simplistic. Many other factors should be certainly described and added to create a more complete and truer picture. My intent is here only to show that our patterns of development run most of the time according to the same tracks of will for power and domination at the expense of human values and general kindness. Without the conscious choice to create a protected space where nurturing feminine values of acceptance and care could be kept safe, masculine values will always dominate and, in the name of efficiency, prevent Yin qualities from arising. Efficiency has yet nothing bad in itself if it is kept in check and 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 and enhance our life experience.



## Chapter 3: The path of liberation

After describing the terms of the present crisis, we need to find the way out of these simplistic and destructive representations. We can call this way the path of liberation because it opens us to a new understanding of life, or more exactly to a systematic questioning of all that we believe in order to free ourselves from false constructs, which have imposed themselves through our monolithic understanding of life as a urge for control of what we do not know because it remains a deep mystery. The path of systematic interrogation shows us the path of liberation.

### The core of the crisis in a nutshell

Before we do this, it is necessary to make a short synthesis how to define the present crisis, which has been presented so far in different terms but still lacks a general overview. Let's try to emphasise which the major trends of this situation are.

#### Linear or circular

*In a society of overproduction and overconsumption there are no cycles. We take what we want without feeding back the context that nourishes us.*

As described above, we live in a culture focused on overproduction, overconsumption and profit. This is the main trend of modern Western society, which sadly leads our common evolution as a species. Market and technology are the two main forces guiding this evolution. We obey them because they are the main practical means we use to foster our present and our future.

Market leads our preferences and choices. Technology guides our sense of meaning and purpose in very pragmatic ways. In using these two main tools and giving them priority, we believe we are independent agents who are free enough of constraints to be able to foster the environment they want to. We believe we are powerful enough and free enough – as individuals or small social clusters – to manage our context and to get what we want for our own pleasure and comfort, without caring too much for adaptation, as if we were the true masters. In this way, we have become (mainly) takers. We take what we want without caring how it impacts our environment. We take and take, exhausting nature and its resources, overloading it with our wastes.

This is precisely the deep conflict that climate change reveals to us. It presents to our way of living a mirror in which we can suddenly discover our own image, the profile of our main characteristics, and see our own devious behaviours reflected back at us. It is a shock – and an opportunity to learn. If we are ready, we'll see things clearly: how we've become self-centred takers, caring mainly for our own interests, neglecting the context that nourishes us. This is true of nature, which we plunder and destroy. It is also true of our human community, which we use for our own purposes, not considering how it can continue to provide all that it does when we only exploit it.

This demonstrates how we live in a linear way when we focus on self-centred greed. The linear way is:

- 1) Nature produces, we consume, and we reject our wastes, which accumulate. We do nothing to ensure that our resources are renewed, that our wastes are absorbed, that our activities enrich our surroundings. We give no thought to feeding back nature as it feeds us.
- 2) In a similar way, our community raises us, educates us, offers us many possibilities for sustenance and expression. We use

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these opportunities but feel no responsibility to give back what we have received so generously.

- 3) Economically or financially, we observe the same process. Poorer nations provide our natural resources (fuel, minerals, wood, food), and buy our products – but the strong imbalance of our exchanges makes them ever poorer and us ever richer. Wealth predominantly circulates one way. We exhaust, and even slowly kill, the goose with the golden eggs.

In stark contrast with our behaviour, nature proceeds in cycles, with unlimited outflowing generosity. Everything in nature works in circular ways, feeding the many sources that provide everything. In nature abundance, cooperation, diversity, complementarity, generosity, sustainability and circularity are the main laws guiding the process: life, air, water and food are pure gifts accessible to all, free of charge. This is how wildlife can survive: they find everything they need in nature. And this is true for humans too. There is nothing that does not come originally from nature. But we do not want to see this obvious fact. We are blind to nature's generosity and circular flow. As takers, we have turned the process of abundance and generosity into a reverse venture of competition, exploitation and domination. We live against the laws of nature, the flow of life. No wonder we're in trouble.

Climate change, the growing gap between poor and rich, decaying biodiversity, imbalances in the main natural equilibriums, our collapsing democracy, supremacy of masculine values over feminine attitudes, and many more forms of evolution, show us that we urgently need to change our mindset.

Not just our opinion, but the entire way we think, live and relate to one another. For this necessary change of mind, we have to undergo a deep mental and spiritual mutation, from an egocentric focus centred on our individual desires to a general perception of

us and our fellow sentient beings as a wide human and living community where each one depends on the others.

Then, and only then, there can be space for the expression of Yin values of compassion, care, listening, inclusiveness, dialogue, equity, reconciliation, peace.

### *The community dimension*

*Nowadays we act as individuals or takers. Yet we all depend on one another for our survival. It is highly time to think / act in terms of community.*

Instead of thinking in linear ways (I take what I can), we have to learn to think in circular ways (how do I give back what I have received so generously). We have to learn to perceive and understand our society (or our universe) as one single body of many organs that need each other to survive and thrive. We need to learn that our own wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of our community. This means we have to feed it back with all we have, in order to nourish and maintain its liveliness and continue to receive from it what we all need. We need to nourish what nourishes us.

If life is truly based on generosity, we have to practise this same generosity one with another. If it is true that relationships matter more than stuff, that the quality of the way by which we live together defines the quality and breadth of what we can experience, then it becomes evident we have to drastically change the way we live together.

Indeed we do not live together nowadays. We just live side by side and try to take advantage of what our surroundings and the others can provide. Of course we can also be kind and take care of our relatives; and we do. But we rarely try to understand how our community functions as a whole and how it needs us to take on responsibilities for the whole. Even too often we feel we are

victims, or at least struggling, and the community owes us more than to others. But we precisely do because we have lost our sense of belonging.

If we want to experience life to the full, it becomes evident that relationships matter more than what we can accumulate. We have to become aware how much these precious human relationships rely on the quality of life we practise in our local community. These relationships do not need to be very special. They can just be normal human relationships with other ordinary human beings. These other people do not need to become special friends.

And we have also to become aware that most goods and services we enjoy or consume together in our everyday life have their roots in the Commons; in the many riches that are provided freely by nature or that are organised and created in a common effort by the community; from life, air, water and shelter, to education, knowledge and wisdom, to health care, creativity and imagination, to compassion, care and inclusiveness, to enlightenment and broader vision of our common future.

And, most important, we have especially to learn to carefully manage these precious goods and values of the Commons to ensure they remain accessible to all and are not appropriated by single dominant actors for their own advantage. We need to care for the community as a whole – a whole we too often forget to consider or even to be aware of.

This is a huge shift I describe here. It's pretty simple in its essence and spirit. It is just about care and attention for our neighbours, and commitment to the harmony of the whole community. Care and attention are where we have to put our energy. Everybody can do this. But this is very demanding because it requires that we shift from our linear egocentric modes

to circular hetero-centric (or world-centric) all-encompassing modes. This is indeed a huge quantum leap that is required.

### *The plague of distraction and entertainment*

*We spend ever more time in front of screens, looking for distraction in entertainment at the expense of our own liveliness and creativity.*

There is in fact a great hindrance on this path towards more community. In our modern age, we are most of us afraid of the complexity of our society that makes us feel so disempowered. On the one hand we feel overwhelmed by the present situation and the issue of our common destiny. On the other hand, we feel yet very absorbed, in priority and focus, by our own interests, comfort and pleasures. And this tendency is reinforced by the fact we feel so disempowered in what concerns the evolution of our society in general. In face of complexity, in order to satisfy our own sense of security, we tend to do what we can to escape reality. We try to find refuge in distraction and entertainment.

Leisure time, entertainment, distraction, holidaying and the passive consumption of various shows on our screens become major activities where we seem to find some relief. Social media allow us to create an image of ourselves and a form of connection with so-called friends we hardly know. We watch films and videos that generate virtual emotions in us. We listen to debates where the participants expose their opinions without being able to check how far these affirmations are reliable. We search for more information on the internet without being able to discern whether this information is trustworthy. Fake news and erroneous information (whether intentionally or by mistake) spread at the speed of light. We play game to “kill time”.

## **Recessive and dominant**

During all the time we spend each day in front of our screens (phone, computer, sms, internet, television), our own life is in standby. We are not even able to make any use of what we learn because we remain passive consumers of these images and news and are not able to translate them into our daily living or a broader social consciousness that would impact our social reality.

Our capacity for concentration has dropped dramatically. Children cannot focus their attention more than a few seconds. We are constantly stimulated by new signals: sounds, images, incoming calls or messages, news.

I believe that the major expanding attraction of entertainment so many people practise today leads us in the opposite direction of true life. We sit on the sofa looking for distraction in ready-made exhibitions of talk and images, instead of experiencing life directly on our own skin as an all-surprising endeavour.

If it is truly urgent that we shift from narrow, self-centred, navel-gazing self-obsession to a broader and compassionate community understanding, we need to stop looking for entertainment as a diversion from the direct experience of life. We must, instead, search for the meaning of life and for what matters most for us as a community, as a real social body. From passive consumers of distraction we have to become active agents in our direct surroundings; first as researcher, then as actors. Finally we have to discover where we may generate authentic conditions of life that become reliable supports for one another.

### **Friendship as involvement in real life**

***Relationships are the building blocks of life. They mean we are involved in one another's life as far as it is requested by each other.***

Money has replaced kinship (relationships). Human relationships are ejected from everyday life and replaced by money exchanges. This is an approximate quotation of the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. He says with these words that market forces have completely transformed our human relationships. These relationships are originally based on exchanges that help us to intensify our connectedness and the human character of our connexion. But money, on the opposite, tends to replace this human aspect of our exchanges by the single transfer of a quantity of cash that tends to put an end to the exchange inasmuch as it constitutes the final compensation that does not expect any further development. Contrarily to traditional exchanges in reciprocity, which call for an intensification of further exchanges in compensation for the past ones. We are in this way, in our market society, deprived of truly human relationships, which rather rely on the reciprocal giving of what we are.

Money (replacing kinship), technology (replacing meaning), individualism (replacing sense of belonging) are the tools of our own ejection from life and social interdependency that form the core of our experience in life. When we reverse this movement of expulsion and try to reintegrate our real place into a network of interdependent relationships, we have the opportunity to rediscover the true meaning of friendship.

As long as we do not reverse this tendency, friendship will remain a leisure activity. We will enjoy good time together having a glass of wine, a delicious meal, a barbecue, a swim, a ride, a dance or watch a show, listen to a concert. But none of these activities will provide the opportunity to be truly concerned with, or involved in, each other's life.

During these usually good times of leisure that we share together we are of course able to exchange about what we have experienced or what we have done, how we have felt and what

we intend to do. This is an important opportunity to connect, know the other better and make ourselves known. And this is a great wealth we can share. But this sharing goes only through talk and nothing is there to test or confront the truth of it. I do not mean that the one who talks is cheating. I mean that there is indeed in talk no direct possible confrontation with any form of reality that would test the authenticity of it.

When I write these present lines, they are only words. They ensue of course out of my experience and my observations of what happens in me and around me. They are honest words because I am truly trying to discover what is true about them and to convey it to you, reader. Yet nothing confronts me with the test of veracity of my talk or writing. These lines are only words that I type on my computer and that are not confronted with the hard struggle of life in its materiality. By contrast committed friendship is precisely what would allow to confront the truth (or untruth) of these words with the visible and invisible matter of life. And this can only happen beyond talk or writing, when we put the talk into practice, i.e. when we walk the talk.

Friendship in this way means interaction and involvement of each one in the life of the other. Involvement should be here understood in a positive way as expression of a deep concern for what the other experiences and how s/he does that. Involvement does not mean intrusion or invasion. Privacy remains what each one wishes it to be, at the degree one wishes it to be.

In these terms more concern means more understanding, better listening, more empathy and also, inevitably, a wish to participate where there is room for participation. Friendship means in this way deeper sharing and involvement because there is something to share through life experience. If I'm involved with you in a building job, I will know you better than if I spend only time with you around a table, drinking and eating and

talking. I will see how you react when effort is required or when you hurt your hand. I will also reveal my weaknesses when I am frustrated or tired. If you visit me when I'm sick, you will discover aspects of my person, of my fragility, you would never know without me being sick. Accompanying people in terminal illness is certainly a very powerful way to connect deeply on a level that touches the essence of life itself. Yet, without looking for such extreme situations, we notice how a practical involvement in one another's life creates the spark that produces the real light.

Friends have skills we do not have. Why don't we trust them to lead us where we cannot go alone? This is not a resignation of being absorbed in the anonymity of the flock. This is not the melting down of diverse personalities into a homogenous mass. No, it is precisely the contrary, becoming more ourselves in order to be unique and provide what we can to the others, and receive from them when we need to. Personalisation is the path and it calls us to become agents of service for one another. To lead and to be lead is probably the cement that keeps community together. This links us into lively relationships of true friendship that foster life and wonder.

### *A vision in consensus*

*When community takes shape in the hands of its members, it has to be guided by a common vision, fruit of the best possible consensus.*

Not only we need to perceive reality as a global context that involves much more than just our small egos; as a complex network of relationships that involves everybody in our surroundings; as a wide living context that starts with nature and the whole universe and makes us alive in our interactions and together being. Not only we need to perceive this global

## Recessive and dominant

involvement of our small persons into a larger whole, we need also to better understand how the whole works as a whole made of parts. We need to (re)discover what the laws of nature and life are that lead its evolution and how far we are involved and how we may influence also in which direction this whole evolves, at the very modest scale of our small influence, which is also the measure of our responsibility towards the whole and the community.

This deeper understanding of the essence of our community and the clear perception of the spirit that animates it are precious gifts or skills that enable us to find ways to integrate into the community, to find our role or to be able to offer our personal contributions to its evolution and transformation. It is then necessary to have a deep knowledge of the way it functions, of the major forces that shape it, and of the mentality that animates it.

It is also necessary to imagine the ways how to help it evolve into something more convivial that would rely on the values of solidarity and mutuality, because these qualities are precisely the creative energies that may bring back our society to a more compassionate together-living; instead of following reductionist materialist priorities, to adopt human leading qualities as our guiding forces.

We urgently need to develop a new vision of where we want to go together, how we want to live together, how we may communicate together and listen to one another, and how to enter into dialogue and find the best possible consensus. This consensus will probably never be complete or perfect, but it will be the best we can achieve.

We need to escape our loneliness and disempowerment, in which market and technology have imprisoned us and in which blind power (totalitarianism) or illusion (fake news and false myths) have driven us. How many of us, as I just described, are stuck at

home watching a screen and trying desperately to connect with others through these artificial means? These devices become tools to exploit us (through manipulation, bullying, data exploitation). We are better off getting directly in touch with people; with life and its unforeseeable surprises and riches.

Life is not a problem to solve or a struggle to win, but a mysterious and sacred process that helps us evolve and grasp deeper truth, whatever this may mean for each of us. This is the starting point, the basic trust we need in life, to be able to escape our trend to escapism and distraction, to come out of our loneliness and to start building together a convivial community. Convivial means: living together. It is what we need to learn to do now.

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. It is where 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 it needs to be deepened to give expression to all immaterial dimensions of our life such as peace, care, justice, equity, love, dialogue. Community provides our roots and identity because it fosters our belonging to a place and its living community. Community includes here all sentient beings.

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. 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. This personal way of belonging forges our identity, not the identification with the group.

### **The indestructible energy of Life**

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

In what precedes we can observe how the Yin dimensions are the missing ones that are restored by the re-remembering of the community. The link with the community is of Yin nature. And the individualism in which we find refuge is of Yang nature. Here again we see how Yang tends to destroy Yin; or, rather, how Yin brings the healing of what has been disturbed by an excess of Yang. The role of the community is to create this protected space for Yin energy.

What I just described of the rich potentials of true community contrasts sharply with the short description I made of the seven stages of human evolution. This summary was meant to show how much we have lost, on our path of evolution, the real consciousness of what matters most. And we mainly lost it not because of what we have discovered but rather because of what we have abandoned, or missed to integrate, by neglect and lack of awareness. We have to reconquer our lost potentials.

Oppression and destruction have destroyed the most subtle Yin qualities of our relationships. They leave us in a desert deprived of compassion and of the ability to give and receive. It has

excluded us and Life from our daily experience or at least repelled it to the private sphere. We need to reconnect with Life and its Source, and make out of it the core of our daily experience.

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

The reason for this poor evolution, that consists in losing the most precious riches and discoveries of humankind, 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 also the corollary of a good news that says that Life will come back as soon as we care for it.

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

## **A need for a new anthropology**

### **The path of liberation**

***The deep change of mentality (mind turn-around) is: what was despised (Yin) becomes the leading value (the corner stone) to be implemented (Yang).***

## Recessive and dominant

There is no liberation without a deep turn-around. This turn-around has preferably to be a transformation of our ways of being, in our minds and in the way we understand what is most precious and what has to become our leading thread. We have to rethink our priorities, but not only as such, i.e. as a hierarchy of values. But we have to review also the fundament of this construction. We need to dig into the subconscious basement of our philosophy and we have to correct the premises on which our society has functioned now for centuries. This deep process of review is not at all about discarding what we have acquired. It is mainly about reorganising the structure when we change the main fundamentals of what matters most in life. It is about getting back what we have lost, or what we missed to integrate from the past heritage at each step of our evolution. These lost dimensions will change everything in the way we understand the world.

The path of liberation cannot be just a refurbishing of what is. It is a necessary deep turn-around 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.

The path of liberation implies the rediscovery of truly human values as priorities that shape life as a search for mystery; by opposition to an attempt to grab the maximum for oneself. It is indeed much more than a search for values. It is a search for a deep transformation of our beings and the way we experience life. It is much more radical than a change of values. It is a change of content, a change of meaning, a change of purpose, a

change of perception that reveals Life as something fundamentally different from what we believe it is when we trust the conventional wisdom of our days (market, technology, comfort, pleasure, individualism).

Of course nobody is capable to explicit what the meaning of life is. And we will never agree to formulate 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 with insatiable curiosity and honesty we will be able to remain fully alive and to wonder. And our common search will activate all feminine qualities of our human nature because these qualities are precisely about the quest for meaning: listen, hear, observe, perceive, receive, care, welcome, include, understand, respect. 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 meant on the psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. It is a general term that concerns each of us in a different way because we are all different and we have gone different paths with different experiences. And we are rich of different knowledge, wisdom, skills. Yet this search is also linked with, and strongly influenced or even shaped by, our



social and cultural context. It is then personal and collective at the same time.

### True debate

*Secularism is a radical form of active censorship. It prevents us from sharing our deepest values in order to define the priorities of a common social project.*

The first step on the path of liberation for us as average Westerners and most privileged people of the planet - we constitute only the 12% of world population who consume 84% 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 ourselves to extract most of the riches of the world and live on it, at the expenses of the poorest and of nature.

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; also because we believe we are entitled to this wellbeing... for the simple reason we are rich (vicious circle). In human and spiritual terms, despite our superior material comfort, we suffer as much as the victims from the destruction of our relationships and of our ability to live a life guided by deep human content.

Once the modern pattern of eternal growth and material accumulation has been broken because it has been revealed to us how much it is based on corruption and hidden exploitation that we are rarely aware of, we may be free to examine what the main priorities in our lives are. Paradoxically diversity is rather a wealth than an obstacle in this search. It prevents us from coming to simplistic conclusions. It is more the lack of simplistic answer

than the possibility of direct consensus about this mystery that will allow our attention to focus on creating conditions that are life bringing. The search is the path more than the means to bring the solution.

In this search we need open conditions. All topics must be addressed without any limitation. Of course the debate must respect cultural, emotional, intellectual, metaphysical and religious diversity and all sensitivities. 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 practicalities and we call this reduction of the debate with the euphemism of secularism.

Secularism says that philosophy and religion should not belong to public debate. They should remain in the private sphere where people can choose to believe what they want.

But what is the significance of our deepest beliefs if we cannot express them in public and if they do not lead our choices and behaviours, whether private or collective? What is the meaning of a public debate if it cannot express metaphysical and spiritual values? Our main choices in life are indeed based more on immaterial preferences than on pure practicalities.

Secularism, when it excludes some topics of debate from the public arena, excludes also the potential insights provided by these excluded topics to help us find the keys for our future. If some themes are missing (discarded) they are not considered. The perspective is skewed because some main components are ignored. How would it be if you have to walk without using your sight, or even just you hearing? You would only grasp some partial aspects of your surroundings. The same with what secularism deprives us from considering.

## Recessive and dominant

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. This evident limitation means that the principle of secularism constitutes a solid obstacle that must be dismantled to open the way to a debate that dares to question any theme: is the Earth flat? does God exist? Is She black?

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; and to enrich the community with their own contributions. 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 as long they are creative and respectful of others. The unity of the community relies on its capacity to include. Inclusion does not happen at the expense of conformism but on the contrary needs to be grounded on complementarity based on the specificity of each one member who is different from the neighbour and can therefore contribute to the general wellbeing by bringing his or her own special skills and aptitudes. One can see how much this image of a true community is different from the flattening impact of globalisation that wants all people to become consumers of the same goods and think the same way because they have access to the same media.

## Dialogue as a mosaic

*Dialogue creates a new perception that arises by addition of many diverse contributions. Only together may they form a new picture.*

The whole is much more than the addition of the parts. Once our identity has broken open, like an egg that hatches, we no longer consider ourselves as accomplished closed entities. We see rather how we fit into the whole as only small particles that call for support from each other. We truly then become able to relate to the other. She is no longer a threat but a fascination, bringing us what we ignore and what we miss the most. Differences no longer trigger fear but become opportunities for enrichment. When we realise that diversity can open our minds and hearts, bringing light and truth, we next need to learn how to have a dialogue with these others.

Dialogue is not about justifying one's own stand or point of view against what others affirm. It's precisely the contrary – we forget about our own standpoint and completely enter the world of the other, in order to understand him or her from the inside. This does not negate our own nature but is a letting go of who we are. We build a bridge in order to understand the other as he or she is.

Dialogue is made up of observation and listening. Listening is more than just hearing. It means going deeply into what is expressed, and even trying to understand what has not been fully expressed. It means understanding how the other forms her perception, from her own point of view.

When there is true dialogue between a group of people who do not share the same points of view – for the simple reason they stand in a different place (another stand point) and they are not repetitive cogs – and when there is true reciprocal listening, something absolutely mind blowing happens: reality transforms and suddenly widens. When all participants bring their own

contributions to the dialogue, another picture<sup>10</sup> arises by itself, made of the combination of all contributions. It reveals itself to be much wider, and more complex and complete, than any of the particular contributions. This is a bit like a mosaic or a mandala, which only starts to represent something when all the stones or colours are in place.

Generating this incredible, complex global view is only possible when we accept that no single one of us has the whole truth. But together, we contribute to a common faculty for true discernment. We need each person's contribution to reach this point, through a willing, full acceptance of the process of hybridisation, which makes it clear that truth can only appear in plurality, diversity, complementarity and complexity.

Once this global view is reached, participants may start to debate the nature and content of a possible consensus, which could guide the group into the future, as a community of individuals in mutual solidarity.

Consensus can be defined as the maximum range of agreement by the many participants in game, concerning the main options that will define our common future, at the expense of many minor concessions by all actors. What consensus does not succeed to include will be controlled by external agents at their own advantage, i.e. very probably at the expenses of the community. Consensus is then a subtle equilibrium between letting go of what is minor in order to consolidate what is major. In this quest we are all participating actors with our own responsibility to make the process as successful as possible.

Diversity and inclusiveness have to become one of the leading threads to reconstitute a more complete and mature society and to learn how to live together despite big differences and antagonisms. In order to allow weaker recessive qualities to flourish we need to protect the inner social sphere from the most powerful pressures that are dominant. We need nothing more than a form of protection that keeps a balance between diverse influences and allows the weaker (Yin) trends to come to fruition.

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<sup>10</sup> The quantum physicist David Bohm describes this phenomenon very well in his book: *On Dialogue*, Taylor and Francis Ltd, Routledge, London, 1996. Or <http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/texts.html#bohm>.

## Chapter 4: Complementarity - a return to life

I have described earlier how Yang and Yin always combine with one another and how they need to develop their reciprocal complementarity in order to be fully expressed. Let's now examine how feminine and masculine energies are complementary and meant to help each other to reach full expression in a combination where each one is not antagonistic to the other but on the contrary a vector of support, as if, by coexisting, both forces would multiply each other's effects. This is what one may call the marriage of the feminine with the masculine.

### The marriage of the feminine and the masculine

#### Perception (Yin) and expression (Yang)

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

The myths of John the Baptist and Mary - they are here considered as myths because of their metaphoric meaning about the essence of life – show how expression and action need to be rooted in a clear perception of what motivates and guides them; and on the other hand to be shaped by a clear understanding of what the content of the message or action intends to make known or to transform. It is indeed sterile to act without motivation or intention. It is why we need to learn ever more how to become

aware of our true motivations and how to reshape these deeper motivations to make them more compatible with the real priorities of our life. This shift concerns rather the principal values and choices that lead us than the mere practical conditions.

Even when our motivations are not clearly expressed, they still remain hidden in our subconscious. They continue to lead our actions. It means that, when we are not aware of what motivates us, the deeper unconscious energy that underlies our action remains fully active although not visible. And our own lack of awareness of the true nature of this energy prevents us from following a path that could be better rooted in what matters most for us or according to Truth.

Mary, as the paradigm of attentive perception and receptive awareness, shows us how much the hidden field of our personal motivations impacts onto our life. It is the Yin dimension. This field is hidden in two ways:

- firstly because it touches at least partly the domain of the unconscious that leads us in unknown ways,
- and secondly because the search for the deeper meaning of life takes mainly place in the most private part of our being.

It is par excellence the private garden of dream, contemplation, meditation and reflection where our intuitions and insights take shape. This is very much the hidden space of our personal creativity. It is a womb where life arises and develops from the first minute intuition to the full expression that can then become more public.

It is important to see how much this space matters and how much it needs to be protected because life in the womb can only develop, in its fragility, when it is secure and protected from external interferences. As long as it is taking form, it needs protection.

This does not mean it is cut off from external life. No, it is very much fostered by past or external influences but it needs this minimum time of protected space to take shape and come to life. This is a time of gestation before it gets born. The expression comes then as an expression of what has matured, protected from external glance.

This time of elaboration of our deepest intuitions and motivations is essential in the way it shapes our personal choices and expression. Without gestation we get poor fruits.

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

In our search for more awareness, deeper perception (sensations) and more subtle meaning (interpretation) become two major important keys.

- Perception through our sensations defines how we become aware of our environment and of what happens around us. It transforms the real facts into signals that are different from the facts because they have been filtered by our senses and our mind. We know by experience that, when our environment is perceived, it has already been transformed into perceptions.
- And our interpretation of what we perceive will, in a further step of transformation, translate the original signals still

further into a content that is an expression of how we see the world. In fact we make the world in which we live inasmuch as we transform the objective reality into personal interpretation that makes the world understandable, or more suitable, to us because we need to give an acceptable meaning to what happens around us.

This attempt of giving a meaning is almost unavoidable because we believe that things have to make sense, even when we are forced to recognise that they may be meaningless or absurd. Yet our subjective interpretation changes the world. This transformation by interpretation is indeed essential in the way we are then able to fit into our own surroundings because, as an interpretation, it gives a meaning, provides an access to the surrounding reality and redirects our behaviour.

These successive stages of perception and interpretation define our further attitudes, choices and (re)actions. They are the Yin components of our personal life. They happen also in reference to a wider context of culture that can be understood as an already formed and kind of readymade interpretation that our culture proposes to us globally as the result of all cumulated past human experience that had to cope with similar events.

We can in this way adopt this more or less readymade interpretation; or on the contrary forge our own; or even do the latter in being inspired by the former. The references for our own interpretation are evidently multiple and complex, hence they generate the diversity of interpretations that we adopt in our own diversity of perceptions when we dare to compare our own with the one of our neighbours. We may also observe how they go through similar experiences as we do, but yet with very different interpretations and conclusions.

We have generally tendency to under-evaluate the important role that these different stages of perception and interpretation play in

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our lives. It is indeed this hidden deeper understanding that will shape our expression and action. The Yang (action) is here defined by the Yin (gestation) that provides its embodiment. The child, before it is born, is shaped by the womb.

This private space is where true incarnation happens. Incarnation consists in much more than the body shape that is given to our invisible being. It is a dynamic process that renews itself constantly and never stops until we die. This is the constant transformation of our life energy into consciousness and expression.

This private space is beyond our will and control. It is a mysterious core where the source of our person is flowing. This is where the true Self is leading us. It means it is far deeper than the realm of all forms of expression. The ego is only the outer shell that has to harden in order to protect this fragile true Self which is our own essence. The ego is not our deeper being. It is only its protective envelop.

The source of life is the energy of our constant transformation. It is the original energy that shapes our being in this deeper inner protected sphere. Who are we? How can we know ourselves? Although we cannot escape our own presence and intimacy, we never can grasp the root of our being. The true Self is the true essence of who we are before we even were born. It is the force of transformation that does not define us as a constant being but, on the contrary, as a flow that constantly changes. Yet despite this permanent transformation there is a core of being, there is a person who is. And this person takes different shapes and expresses herself in different ways.

What we have soon learned to control, already as a little child, is how our true Self comes to external expression after it arises in this deeper protected space. Our natural tendency is to prevent it from flowing naturally. We generally do not accept it to lead us freely because we are afraid of this powerful energy of life that

could escape our control. In consequence we do incredible efforts to control it, to restrain it and to reshape it in more socially suitable forms that would serve our interests and our formal representations of how people should behave in order to be powerful, prestigious and to impress our surroundings.

Tibetan Buddhist teaching describes eight main social worries, describes as pairs, which lead us on the path of illusion:

- 1) the hope for pleasure and the fear for displeasure or suffering,
- 2) the hope for gain and the fear for loss,
- 3) the hope for good reputation and the fear for disgrace,
- 4) the hope for praise and the fear for blame.

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

Yet the potential remains fully at any time. And we remain constantly able, also at any time, to learn how to refrain our false self from controlling our true deeper nature. This is a long process of self-transformation. As a priority we have to learn how to be free from fitting stereotypically into the social construct. It does not mean that we do the contrary of what is expected from us. It means “only” that we remain focussed on what this powerful energy teaches us, from inside, and that we do what is possible to conform to this deeper energy. This learning process is rooted in consciousness.

Then we are more ready to find ways of expression. This is the Yang dimension.

### *Nurturing (Yin) and structuring (Yang)*

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

Our being is like a garden. This is a very common metaphor that tells us how we have to feed the soil. Gardening is mainly the art to prepare the soil that has to be as rich and diverse as possible, nevertheless adapted to the plants we want to grow in it, with the right ingredients and the right pH which vary from one plant to the next. Before it starts to grow, we need to protect the plant from snails and birds and other greedy teeth or beaks. This is the Yin dimension.

Then it will probably need a structure to support it. Tomatoes plants can grow without a stake but the tomatoes will get more sunlight if they can hang on the strength of the stake. This is a simple metaphor that tells us how our children and our own child in us need to be fed properly and to be offered a structure that supports but does not enclose them. A skeleton supports the body and allows it to develop without restraining its development while a shell protects much better but prevents the in-dweller from extending beyond the limits defined by the shell itself. Structure is meant to provide support without restricting the evolution of the fundamental potentials of the being it supports. This is the Yang dimension.

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

human-made picture of our reality that is very defined and controlled by our intellectual faculties and also by our will to remain in control of what we observe.

Science, although it is precise, has built an image of our world that is much deprived of any sacred dimension. It is its conscious choice to restrict its field of investigation to what can be measured and to the experiments that can be repeated. This restriction is the necessary condition for its seriousness as science. It is then a gain for the solidity of its mission. But it is also a limitation. It is evidently not its task to investigate the immaterial world of the spirit. Yet its attitude towards the other dimensions of our reality (the immaterial dimensions) becomes nevertheless often dominant and exclusive, as if it were competent – as if it had the adequate tools – to investigate this wider Reality that escapes measurements. And this restrictive influence is still reinforced by the fact science adopts too often a contemptuous attitude towards other approaches. It pretends to represent the only possible access to knowledge. Allied with technology it has become a dominant force of our perception of the universe.

Of course it remains clear that science and spirituality meet on a higher level. But they are often presented as antagonistic movements of investigation (observation vs introspection), especially when science is challenged by metaphysical or spiritual perceptions; and reciprocally when religion disparages the material world as if this physical reality were not also a subtle expression of sacredness. This is then the self-imposed limitation of religion.

In this sharp contrast between two complementary roles of science and religion, we may notice how science, despite its pretence to be objective, is also nevertheless, beyond its powerful revelation of many fundamental aspects of reality, a

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powerful epistemological construct. It has certainly examined our surroundings with extreme precision but, probably because of this too strong focus on details, it has lost the wider picture and the awareness of its restricted approach. A broader investigation of reality - based on the understanding that it is a mystery that surpasses any possible representation - may allow us to restore, or at least reintroduce, a wider frame of wonder as the major dimension of the picture, which we are aware never to master.

The feeding approach of the gardener, or fertilisation, is then a constant debate about truth that never stops escaping us. Fertilisation, in this wider sense, provides only the basic material that may create favourable conditions that allow openness of mind and curiosity for new discoveries. Fertilisation, in this meaning, may suggest also some insights how to handle the substance of knowledge and wisdom but it never provides any ready-made answer.

It is where the structure plays a major role because it has to offer this support that helps the growth without restricting the evolution. It supports the being in order to help it discover life without proposing or restricting the freedom of movement. The structure stimulates the need to question everything. It establishes the different connections that allow the being to relate to others or to develop further links between different aspects of life or topics. Life is a wide network of relationships that never stops evolving and changing, establishing ever new relations while previous links have died out or have rather been transformed into something new, more complex and more conscious.

When education, in a wider sense, has to offer good nourishment and structure, it means that it has also to propose many possible interpretations. It does not mean that the disciple should accept them as such. No, on the contrary, they should be received as

many challenges to question further their validity. It is very difficult to forge one own opinion in front of a blank sheet of paper, or in front of a single doctrine. But a text that exposes many controversial interpretations will provoke reactions of adequacy or rejection which are very rich. They will encourage the disciple to find his/her own way.

It is why, I believe, it is wrong to forbid the teaching of religion at school. It is a way to deprive the students of the possibility to forge their mind and to discover new ways of beings. Only a clear exposure to the diversity of possible interpretations of the world, whether scientific, poetic, humanistic, metaphysical or spiritual, is able to help the students, and people in general, especially if they are young, to find their own way. Of course a sound exposure to these different traditions or interpretations should not be fundamentalist in order to respect the freedom of mind that each one may have the privilege to practise. On the contrary they should expose a diversity of possible interpretations, and even the possible controversy or negation of them.

In this short description we may recognise the nurturing quality of Yin and the structuring aptitude of Yang. They combine and try to offer the necessary conditions without restricting. This movement of giving life is not an effort for control but a pure gift of free responsibility. Freedom is here of course not just the ability to choose what is convenient and comfortable. It is the ability to move without restrictions in a space that allows conforming to truth, as far as we can grasp what truth consists in. True freedom is the free acceptance of the constraints imposed by truth. Freedom is the path (the form), truth is the content.

On this search nurturing (Yin) and structuring (Yang) play together very complementary roles that seem antagonistic but yet combine in infinite ways to allow balance (the third term) to be found, although, as it is dynamic, this balance never stops



escaping and coming back under another form of dialogue between these antagonistic yet complementary forces. We can see how this dialogue develops between the two poles of form and emptiness.

### *Emptiness (Yin) and form (Yang)*

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

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

I believe, as a metaphor, we can describe our position as human beings in a space between three worlds. This metaphor describes how these three worlds interact to create our reality.

- Firstly there World 1 (W1). This is the wider world of the Universe with its laws of harmony and love that foster life. This is a world of abundance and generosity that generates a constant flow of energy and resources, which are able to feed any need we may have, each of us, and the whole humanity as well as the many other species that form part of this wide universe in the same way as we do as mankind. This world is the background, the frame, the hull, the true content of our experience. It is the source of our true essence, the source of our being, the source of Life. It cannot be seen although it is the core of everything. It is beyond form but it nevertheless rules all aspects of life. It is the source of everything. Without it nothing would exist. But without form it would not be perceptible. It is like the wind; you can't see it, but

you can only become aware of its impact by the observation of its influence on the trees that move under its energy.

- Secondly there is World 2 (W2). This is the world of our surroundings, of nature, of the Earth on which we live because we are incarnated beings. As we have bodies and live in space and time, we have ceaselessly to cope with forms: forms of our own body and presence, forms of our surroundings and forms we give to what we create, i.e. our ways of living as well as what we dare to transform in our environment, whether material or social. The world in which we live is the form that reveals the true content of the source of our being, of our true essence. These outer appearances (W2), although they are not the essence (W1), make it visible.
- Thirdly there is World 3 (W3). This is the world we construct with our mind. We never stop trying to understand and to interpret what happens in front of us, in this visible world in which we live (W2). Because we believe that what we observe and what we understand of the visible world is a true description of its authentic nature, we never stop projecting our own understanding and wishes onto the outer world. The real world disappears because the first world (W1 = our source) is not visible and the second world (W2 = the visible aspect of W1) gets covered by our own projections. These projections (W3) replace the real world and we live in the fiction that we have created. Because the true expression of the first world is hidden, we lose track of reality and we live in an illusionary world we have created ourselves. On top of this we try to transform the surrounding world (W2) to make it more compatible with our wishes (W3). The distortion is then double, because of our projection and because of our transformative influence. The reality of injustice of our social

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

The relationships between these three worlds are complex although they form only one and unique world (W1-3). But our mind never stops transforming the world of our surroundings (W2) because we feel the need to interpret it, to judge it, to impose our will and to adapt it to what we believe it should be (W3).

In other words it means that we are not happy to live in a world of harmony. We are afraid of life and we need to protect ourselves from life. We interpret therefore what we see; we project what we want; we think intensively about what we perceive and we remain nevertheless confronted to the deep mystery that it reveals.

It is important to see that, although we try to transform our surroundings, this world of appearances is basically expressing the true nature of the invisible world (W1 = the wider universe with its laws of harmony as origin of our essence) but we never cease intervening in it and we lose therefore the wider picture. Although we have no experience of what the true wider universe is, we start very early in childhood to build our own image of what the world is and what it should be, i.e. how it should be transformed and adapted in order to serve our needs and desires.

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

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

This need for power leads to all forms of domination we know: violence at home, fear of the others, inner insecurity, compensation in false forms of escape (addictions, habits, restrictions), exploitation, rejection, marginalisation, segregation, hate, war. But, even if it has such wide and possibly violent expressions in the outer world, the source of this trend for domination remains yet very intimate, in the personal or collective projections of our minds onto the surroundings i.e. this third world (W3) we have constructed in our imaginary mind.

We never stop creating a world of fiction that does not fit with the real world (W2) because we want to ignore the hidden face of it (W1), the invisible harmony that does not materialise in the way we would like it to. Because of this artificial picture of the world we have created and continue to create ceaselessly in our mind and phantasy, we stand in relationship with the world of our incarnation (W2 that reveals to us the true nature of W1) in a deep conflict that prevents us from seeing how this first world is in fact perfectly fitting our needs. The thought creates the twist and the false image we create in this way hides the true picture, and, more important, the true experience of life. The more we build our world at our convenience, the more we imprison

ourselves into an illusory world that becomes more and more frightening. And the more we are frightened, the more we try to escape from this cruel world. Then, worse than ever, we transform the world to adapt it to our false picture. In one word we mess it up.

The only way out of this infernal spiral is to come back to ourselves in our interior protected space (Yin) and to reconsider the madness of our experience. In the silence of our inner peace we have many possibilities to see the cracks of this outer image and to let the light come in, as says the poet (Leonard Cohen). In our inner silence we can afford to delve into this wider Reality (the first world) that is all encompassing and loving. On one hand we perceive this inner truth of peace and on the other hand we have forged this mad fiction. It is our choice to decide which one we want to trust and which one we want to build our life onto, in the intermediary world of appearances (W2), before it is falsified by our projections.

The choice between these two forms of understanding (the one that returns to the source and the one that relies on our projections) seems first to be impossible by lack of trustful signs of what the truth is. Observation is a powerful tool when it is used with detachment and the committed will to see the truth and only the truth and at any price. Forms of our outer world (the second world of our incarnation) reveal to us the true reality that hides behind forms and appearances. They show on one hand the Reality that rules the universe (the laws of the universe and the intention that guides them) and on the other hand the madness of our human construct and how far these two worlds seem opposed although they are one. The split between both is nothing else than this mad construct we have elaborated through the centuries by believing the many crazy thoughts that arise in our mind.

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

Our obsessions with appearances and forms (Yang) create our problem, and therefore our suffering. We have difficulty to accept that Emptiness (Yin) is the true essence of what we perceive. Emptiness is the Reality beyond any concept and representations, where we let Life develop and act as it is, without hindrance.

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

When we accept that our material reality only allows short glimpses and when we understand that we can trust Reality because it is harmonious and based on love, we can let go of our fears and accept our powerlessness in a move that provides us

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with everything we need. Reality is a mystery and this mystery is graciousness, as uses to say Zen teacher AMA Samy.

This means that Reality cannot be grasped but, despite that, Graciousness is the living connection we may enter in relationship with the personal aspect of the Universe: Purusha for the Hindus, Emptiness for the Buddhists, Yahweh for the Jews, Christ for the Christians, Al-Haq for the Muslims – although these entities are not strictly equivalent - or just the Ground of Being for whoever accepts that our world is guided by a personal force of love and an intention to lead it to accomplishment, beyond its mere material appearances.

This personal expression of the Ground of Being reveals to us that our connection with the deeper Reality is not an abstract quest of the Absolute but, on the contrary, a deep personal experience of a quality that touches us in the deepest part of our being. Love and harmony and peace are the words used to describe it but it remains beyond words, because also we can only catch short glimpses of it, ever flitting perceptions that never can be stopped. In this antagonistic yet complementary relationships between form and Emptiness, Yin and Yang are evidently the leading energies that open us to the mystery while recognising yet all forms of expression, even if they are partial, which they are inevitably.

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

the Heart Sutra. Here again the mystery challenges us and opens the door to true life and true love.

### **Innocence (Yin) and knowledge (Yang)**

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

We can observe in the preceding description how our relationship with our surroundings (natural or social) is falsified by what we believe we perceive it is intrinsically. As my simplified description above of our historical evolution has shown, our perception of the world has been ever more shaped by our rational mind. The impact of science and technology is constantly increasing. Their energies become the leading forces in our world, with the support of the market that does nothing else than codify our relationships in these material terms.

We know more and more and we are proud of this evolution. Certainly our scientific and material knowledge of our surroundings has drastically increased in the last centuries. Health and education have greatly improved thanks to these new ways of better understanding the forces at play and interacting with the tools that may solve many problems of our everyday life. On the other hand spiritual wisdom and philosophical knowledge have developed powerfully and provide many partial answers or at least indicate directions in which to go if we want to respond to our present dilemma about the future.

Yet it is essential to see that a too clear picture of the wider image of our condition can be as reducing as it can be helpful. Paradoxically it does probably both at the same time. In discovering a scientific picture of our world (our interpretation of the incarnated side), we draw also a picture of what it is. As described earlier our mind redesigns the world in an attempt to

make it understandable. This effort is certainly very helpful, yet only under the restrictive condition that it does not reduce reality (Reality) to our understanding and to the picture itself. A picture is a representation of the world. But, as the saying puts it, the map is not the territory. And we saw before how the picture (the construct) we create of the world is the cause of our suffering. This means that the picture we elaborate of the world, inasmuch as it helps us to understand it, will also reduce our perception of the reality itself and imprison us therefore in its narrow view.

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

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

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

Ignorance is Yin. It is in this way a powerful tool for discovering what is still unknown. Ignorance is not at all the negation of knowledge; it is its source because it is the motivation for opening to the unknown. Ignorance is paradoxically the solution of knowledge. To be able to recognise that ignorance constitutes the necessary condition of what is able to reveal the deeper truth, one needs to develop a personal and intimate relationships with innocence<sup>11</sup>.

Innocence (Yin) is the state of mind and of being which we adopt when we rely more on the flow of life than on our own power to control our destiny. Innocence is lived ignorance as sincere opening to what is and to what has to come (Emptiness). Children practice innocence in their everyday life because they are not aware of what is coming and take it as it is. They do not plan and do not act with a purpose. When they do, it means that

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<sup>11</sup> There is a beautiful dialogue between Thomas Merton and Daisetz T. Suzuki on this theme in Thomas Merton: *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, New Direction, 1968.

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they have reached the age where they are slowly losing their ability to live in innocence.

Once innocence is lost it seems impossible to us to go back to this state of bliss where the experience of the world reveals a wider and deeper picture that is not corrupted by what we believe we know of it. How can we be able to go back to innocence as the true form of ignorance that opens us to the deep mystery?

Zen has traditionally tried to teach the path of wisdom where one gets free of our way to understand the world and life through concepts when we are open to another more direct experience of Reality.

We saw earlier, about the myths of the Garden of Eden, how the Tree of Life represents the innocent approach of Life as a Source that provides us with everything. There is only Life and nothing else and our vocation is to let go of everything and let Life take hold of us. On the opposite there is the Tree of Knowledge that represents the way we divide every aspect of reality into two opposite forces. We fall into dualism and learn to distinguish good and evil, the world and us, body and mind, God and his creation, suffering and happiness. Instead of following the flow we resist it and try to grasp what we want and reject what we do not want. Life becomes a huge struggle against reality to make it correspond to our own wishes, as if we could decide what reality should be.

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

ourselves free of narrow concepts in order to return to the Source as an experience beyond words and representations (Innocence).

It seems that knowledge and innocence are antagonistic as Yang and Yin. They are probably opposed forces in the way the former is full while the latter is empty. But they are also certainly complementary. Indeed they need each other because they can progress only when they combine. Knowledge, as Yang energy, has too much the power to freeze what has been grasped. And therefore it needs innocence, as Yin energy, to free knowledge from its own corset. Reciprocally innocence needs knowledge as a help for innocence to mature in learning how to be confronted by experience and by what experience brings as new perception and understanding. Yet innocence has to remain powerful and not to be squashed by the new acquired formulation of truth that seems to ensue out of experience.

In other words one could say that knowledge concerns rather the practicalities of our daily life while innocence is the ladder to higher truth.

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

### Focus (Yang) and attention (Yin)

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

It seems very rich to me to distinguish two forms of awareness: focus and attention are two different qualities of concentration.

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

The learning process for a deeper attention is a long path. Many adults do not even practice attention or focus.

Focus, as Yang energy, is a form of very concentrated attention. It tends to exclude all other aspects of life in order to concentrate on one single object. It is evidently a privilege to be able to focus on a single object and not to be distracted by external influences. Yet it is important to see that this way of focussing is a typical product of our culture. This is a natural tendency of the mind to be caught by problems and to come back again and again to the current problems of our daily life. Minute problems are like peanuts for our monkey mind! It means that our mind has the tendency to focus on small objects and enjoys chewing problems. It is like an obsession and even when the problem cannot be

solved or has already been solved, the mind returns nevertheless ceaselessly to it and chews it again in a vicious circle. Small problems provide food for the mind but food that does not nourish it; it only keeps it busy.

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

Focus is a Yang aptitude while attention in its broadness is a Yin attitude. They evidently combine and are complementary. We certainly need both in our daily life. Focus is rather useful for the practicalities of life while attention provides the wider picture of the meaning which gives sense to the nitty-gritty.

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

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great this part may be. Attention is the fruit of commitment to the path of discovery. It is not a conquest but a form of supplication.

Simone Weil writes<sup>12</sup>: “We liberate energy in ourselves, but it constantly reattaches itself. How are we to liberate it entirely? We have to desire that it should be done in us — to desire it truly — simply to desire it, not to try to accomplish it. For every attempt in that direction is vain and has to be dearly paid for. In such a work all that I call ‘I’ has to be passive. Attention alone — that attention which is so full that the ‘I’ disappears — is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call ‘I’ of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived. The capacity to drive a thought away once and for all is the gateway to eternity. The infinite in an instant.”

## A new strategy

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

### *The systematic questioning of our thoughts*

*Our mind never stops producing new thoughts and bits of knowledge. We need to question these thoughts and free ourselves from them.*

Our western culture highly values the power of our intellect and the capacity of our mind to produce thoughts and concepts. We have tendency to trust these thoughts and concepts because we

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<sup>12</sup> Simone Weil: *Attention and Will*. Extract from *Gravity and Grace*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1952. Originally published as *La Pesanteur et la Grace*, Plon, Paris, 1947.

believe that they are the products of experience and the fruit of an authentic observation of reality. They seem to be trustworthy knowledge. Sure, they are partly. Yet they are also, at the same time, only thoughts our brain produces ceaselessly; without taking care of checking their validity. They keep us entangled in the vicious circle of their narrowness because they do not only produce ideas but they also define our immediate thinking space, and its limits, which is then perceived to be self-sufficient. They keep us circulating inside this limited space, without perceiving that the narrowness of our thinking space is confirmed by the thoughts themselves.

- If I hear a rooster crow, my brain immediately produces in my mind an image of this rooster although I probably have never seen it. Of course the thought will be true as far as the image represents a rooster. But I will never know whether the rooster I heard is white or black, small or big, or even if the sound I heard is not just the recorded sound of a rooster that probably does not exist any longer or a lyre bird imitating it. Visibly the image does not fit the fact. I have been tricked by my mind.
- Not only our brain produces images for everything that happens but it comes often into distress because, for so many possible sounds in our surroundings, it cannot find the suitable image in the limited storage of our own memory. Our mind will then invent an image in order to find peace and try to trick the user (i.e. us) in making her believe that the picture fits the object – which is evidently not trustworthy!
- On top of this incapacity to answer so many demands our mind has the great ability to interpret what it becomes aware of and to immediately produce a judgment. It evaluates in a micro-second what it perceives and divides it into good (nice) or bad (disturbing) according to its own preferences.



- As I described it before, it writes also the script of what other people are meant to do, how they should behave, what they should think and feel in order to fit into our own world of representations, into our own construct of the world and into our own projects we have designed without asking them how they feel being involved in them.
- Because we are the observers, egocentrically centred on our own point of view, i.e. our stand point, we believe that we are the navel of what we see happening around us. And we try to fit these events into our world view and to make them correspond to our expectations. In doing so we betray more ourselves than the reality we try to grasp.

Byron Katie<sup>13</sup> has well described how we never stop measuring the surrounding according to our expectations and how we prevent others from being who they are, while we make ourselves extremely unhappy because our thoughts lead us into turmoil and prevent us from enjoying what is as it is.

Yet we would fully enjoy it as a perfect expression of life and we would consider it with the deepest calm and joy if we were free from our twisted preconceptions. This enforced unhappiness onto ourselves demonstrates how much our thoughts generate our self-created misfortune and prevent us from living a good life.

### Loving what is

***Byron Katie proposes a method in four questions and a “turn-around” that help us to question our thoughts and see clearly our the trick us and prevent us from loving what is.***

Here is the method that Byron Katie proposes us, destined to challenge any thought that concerns our expectations of what anybody else should do or be, or about any situation that we judge. The method seems so extremely simple that we tend to discard it when we do not see immediately how much power it has to help us solve our daily problems.

As preamble to the method Byron Katie suggests that we write down a few sentences that describe how we feel about a given stressful situation or, more powerful, about a stressful relationship with a person who lives in our direct proximity (family, colleague, neighbour). To help us describe the situation, she asks first six questions<sup>14</sup>:

- 1) In this situation, who angers, confuses, saddens, or disappoints you, and why? (*Example: I am angry with Jim because he doesn't listen to me.*)
- 2) In this situation, how do you want them to change? What do you want them (not) to do? (*Example: I want Jim to see that he is wrong. I want him to stop lying to me. I want him to see that he is killing himself.*)
- 3) In this situation, do you need or expect anything from them? (*Example: Jim should take a deep breath. He should calm down. He should see that his behaviour frightens me. He should know that being right is not worth another heart attack.*)
- 4) In order for you to be happy in this situation, what do you need them to think, say, feel or do? (*Example: I need Jim to hear me when I talk to him. I need him to take care of himself. I need him to admit that I am right.*)

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<sup>13</sup> Byron Katie: *Loving what is: four questions that can change your life.* Rider, 2002.

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<sup>14</sup> The method exposed here is described on Byron Katie's website and can be downloaded free of charge: <https://thework.com/>

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- 5) What do you think of them in this situation? Make a list. Remember, be petty and judgmental. (*Example: Jim is unfair, arrogant, loud, dishonest, way out of line, and unconscious*).
- 6) What is it about this situation that you don't ever want to experience again? (*Example: I don't ever want Jim to lie to me again. I don't ever want to see him ruining his health again*).

Once you have filled the form in answering these six questions and got your six statements, you start with the examination of what you wrote. Byron Katie proposes to ask four more questions which constitute the core of the method:

- 1) Is it true?
- 2) Can you (or I) absolutely know that it is true?
- 3) How do you (or I) react when you (or I) think that thought?
- 4) How would you (or I) be without that thought?

When we start questioning these statements (these thoughts) we notice how they are a construct of our own and how much these thoughts we have generated make us unhappy. The questions reveal that we cannot be sure of what we believe about the others. And we can also become aware that we would feel much better without the thought, which is a sign that there is something wrong in our doing.

Then Byron Katie proposes a turn-around: you have to express the same statement (the thought) in the negative form or in inverting the subject and the object. For instance “he should listen to me” becomes “I should listen to him” or “I should listen to myself”, or “He should not listen to me”, or any similar formulation. In practising the method, we notice soon that the turn-around, in its new form, reveals a deep truth that may well indicate the future path for getting rid of the thought and free of this imprisoning concept.

If you are not convinced, just try the method on yourself. And you'll soon change your mind.

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

This approach of systematic questioning is radical. It puts the mind back into the real place of the creative dimension of our person. Our mind captures impressions and transforms them into many reactions. The process of questioning these thoughts and playing with them is very lively and creative. Contrarily to what our mind tends to do, the process of introspection does not imprison us into a narrow world that we build as a fiction. On the contrary it liberates us from our own shackles. It is why the systematic questioning of whatever arises in our own minds is a way to enjoy the creativity of the process of life without getting enclosed by it.

We learn then to marvel at the infinite creativity of our mind that proposes images, dreams, verbal expressions that even do not need to be true. They are just no more than creative and gratuitous acts of the mind that never stops – a bit like a sewing machine – to produce patterns or thoughts that can be enjoyed for their single capacity of creativity; beyond any need for these thoughts to be true or implemented in changing our world.

When we learn to follow this method of questioning our thoughts, we discover a way of being that is directly in touch with the energy of life. We live in the present and open ourselves to the richness of just being, without any after-thought, without any need to implement everything that pops up in our mind.

We can then observe how thoughts, emotions, impressions are not actions of our own but events that happen to us and in us. It is like a show of which we would be the spectators, without being truly involved except as witnesses; getting involved in a way that is not controlling but that is not passive either. You sit and watch and enjoy. Even if it looks mad or unrealistic or just completely out of place, you can enjoy it because you know it is not impacting on the world – because you are free from its influence. It is just cinema, a show to be marvelled at. Without judgement, but only joy.

This awareness becomes typically the joy of the witness when this joy is part of everything that happens but does not depend on it, whether we like it or not. There can be sunshine or rain, hot or cold, enmity or love, there remains in any case always the same quality of joy in life. This is certainly the perfect wisdom, which is not easy to experience in continuity but which nevertheless truly provides authentic joy and peace. This method shakes the process while it questions the result. Life becomes a direct experience when it is no longer a project for transforming what is; but just an opportunity to be fully alive, and nothing else, nothing more.

### **Process and result**

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

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

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

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

One can easily see how much the linear way is a Yang pattern while the circular follows a Yin pattern. Evidently these two ways do not exclude each other but on the contrary are very complementary. Nevertheless they form two different and pretty much opposed methods of looking at the world. It is rare to meet people who are at ease with both ways in equal manners and can

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apply the one or the other indifferently; depending on which one is the most suitable for the given circumstances.

Our western society, with its market domination and its fascination for production, consumption and profit, is clearly focussed on the result and neglects to consider the quality of the process. Consequently work and living conditions – the process – degrade while growth happens for the profit of a few – the result. They even dare to say that the aim justifies the means. The market and our whole society are at war, one against the other, in order to get the final reward. On the contrary traditional societies, because they are weak and fragile, know that they have to cultivate the quality of the process because it allows them to care for, and involve, all, so that nothing gets lost. And the participation of all may be maximal.

Of course this is only the basic principle. Facts do not follow strictly this pattern because this is only a pattern and reality is much more complex. Yet we may consider how much in traditional societies the care for the process is dominant and combines with a circular approach that focuses on the joy of interaction and relationships. The process becomes the purpose or opportunity, if not even the pretext, for creating new links and interactions. Sometimes even the end product gets forgotten on the way and nothing is especially achieved. Yet joy remains.

The present book is built in a similar Yin way with a rather circular form of expression. It is not constructed on a rational linear process. It is made out of a series of topics which are described each one by a first sentence that summaries the following explanation, one after the other, as one picks fruits from a tree and puts them into a basket, or more exactly a bottle stand. One can then remove one bottle (topic) and replace it by a more thorough description, or even another topic, without the whole demonstration collapsing. By addition of successive touches or descriptions, like stains of colours or colour stones –

with repetitions (the leitmotifs of Yin and Yang) that tell the same truth but under a slightly different angle – the picture or mosaic emerges slowly according to a least structured pattern. This method allows to describe complexity without freezing it into a solid state, but keeping it moving and flowing. The description itself can evolve because the parts can be replaced or modified; and the general picture changes consequently.

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

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

This means that we need then to concentrate on the quality of the process; this is on life itself as the real core of the experience. This will completely change our world. If we look at how much the process is inhabited by a sense of equity, by an intention to leave nobody behind or aside, by a priority to care that all needs are covered for all, that life conditions improve through the

process itself, we become transformed. Such a process cannot any longer be dominated by materialistic obsessions. But equity arises and the quality of justice and peace reconquers what was left to the domination of false laws and justifications. We can then much better see how these twists of false privileges were only the concern of a minority and were blindly accepted by the majority without having been tested.

A deep attention to the quality of the process transforms the nature of the whole process and changes it into a creative act of transformation that relies mainly on human relationships and no longer on criteria of material efficiency or greed for impossible conditions of growth and profit that destroy our environment (social as much as natural).

### *Institution and intuition*

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

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

suitable and what is not; rigorous knowledge and no longer innocence.

Generally we may observe how the institution as structure slowly, step by step, supplants the body itself. It means that the logic of the machine takes over the fundamental function or meaning. We assist then how decisions are taken no longer in order to serve the purpose or the aspirations of the members as a community motivated by a common intuition. But they tend to develop the structure itself, independently of its aim, and to increase the constraining role of its functioning. The purpose or aim or vocation of the group is slowly replaced by the mechanical constraints imposed by the safeguard of the machine and of its inner power structure. This process has killed many religions, many social and political movements, many schools of thoughts, even many artistic movements.

1) Health services develop in the way they are no longer able to answer the needs of the patients but are regulated by the power of the medical body or general administrators, who decide which kind of health has to be implemented. Remedies and chirurgical treatments become the dominant means of intervention, which become tools of control over the life of the patients. They generate secondary effects, which are much too often worse than the illness itself. In this way health services develop as a machine that disempowers patients in the name of the science of a few specialists.

These specialists have ever more difficulties to listen. They have lost, through overspecialisation, the overview of what human beings are living through in their broader experience of life, which includes so many more aspects than the functioning of a particular organ.

Home care is ever more often forgotten (except in the purpose of reducing costs) and assistance by relatives, as well as

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simple traditional remedies, are abandoned at the profit of an ever growing institution: the hospital.

- 2) Education services, i.e. schools, universities, professional colleges, trade institutes have lost the function of providing people with personal development opportunities. Training is meant to deliver an end-of-school or training certificate in order to provide some measurable criteria for the selection of workers for given jobs. People are expected to serve the purposes of a global economic system, before they are encouraged to develop their own skills and creativity at the service of their own community. They are trained as cogs for fulfilling their role in a system, and not as human beings free to choose the way they intend to use their skills.
- 3) Temple or Church or Mosque institutions, whether they are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, or other, are in charge of defining the right doctrine and imposing it onto the faithful. Personal spiritual experience tends to be ignored although it is in fact the core of any spiritual evolution. Experience is meant to be replaced by mere theory about a human-made god, who nevertheless remains ungraspable as the “unfathomable mystery”, out of reach of doctrine. “God is put in a box” in order to be better “mastered”.

Clericalism develops as the inner dynamic that justifies the hierarchical structure of authority and the tendency to status quo. Luckily inspired participants - whether at grassroot level or at the top – never stop reviving at the same time this deadening structure. They deepen their own personal sensitivity and develop their readiness to be committed to a form of faith that remains open to an ever surprising experience of life.

In these three examples, we can observe how there is a powerful inversion of the meaning of the institution that was meant to serve the aspirations of a group of inspired people or users. It

finishes by imposing a logic which is not only completely foreign to the original vocation but even radically antagonistic to it. The servant has become the oppressor.

We need urgently to proceed into a deep review of our institutions because they play a very important role in the way people, in our society, become the slaves of a system that have lost the spirit of service and has been replaced by a rather totalitarian system. This totalitarian dimension should not be understood in the sense that the police rings at our doors at 6am to get us into prison but that the main trends of our social construct are defined by forces – regulations, constraints of economic forces, trends of exclusion and marginalisation in case of non-adaptation, ways of seduction by values that are anti-life or at least anti-human, or simply forces of basic needs – that coercively impose many forms of behaviour that are contrary to the laws of life and the building up of a true narrowly knitted human community.

Ivan Illich<sup>15</sup> has very well demonstrated how, the more an institution is inefficient, the more it gets additional subsidies in order to develop more complexity and complementary services to be added to a corpus that is basically dysfunctional; instead of seeing that the principle itself of the given institution has gone mad and needs therefore to be replaced by a fundamentally different approach and anthropology.

The institution has walls. And these walls become the fences that segregate the people who are inside the walls (the ones who use the institution, serve it or believe in it) from the people who stay outside the walls (the “sceptics”). Once again we assist at the segregation between “us” and “them”. The institution becomes the judge of the ones who do not belong to it, in terms of

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<sup>15</sup> See: Ivan Illich: *Tools of Conviviality*, Calder & Boyars, 1973; and *Medical Nemesis, The Expropriation of Health*, Random House, Inc., 1976.

exclusion and condemnation, because it erects itself as a judge of the world in reference to its own existence as if its own logic were the navel of the universe.

And reciprocally too, the people left outside judge how the institution does not understand them. The sick claims that he suffers and is not listened to or understood. Religion seems from outside the institution to be a social construct based on imagination and indoctrination. Education becomes selective and is no longer accessible to all. And so on.

### *Life as bottom-up movement*

*Institutions can only be revived in their deeper meaning if they let people inspire them, in a bottom-up movement that gives expression to creativity and diversity (complexity).*

It was necessary to describe the settings of institutions before we could describe what makes here sense in terms of femininity and masculinity. The structure of the institution follows evidently a Yang tendency while the aspiration that animates the original vocation is Yin energy. Both are necessary and complementary as I have described earlier about nurturing and structuring. The structure plays an evident necessary role in order to offer a skeleton to an aspiration which has to find its own forms of expression. Yet it happens in my three examples that the structure has taken over the meaning of the body.

In health it imposes scientific means in the hand of powerful specialists who no longer consider the human being as a whole complex being with many dimensions, physical and non-physical. In education it transforms an opportunity for the development of personal potential and creativity into a standard or calibre that has to provide the necessary cogs (workers, consumers) for the global economic system. In spirituality it

defines the right dogma to be believed in as if life were just a question of having the right official belief when it is rather a personal experience that leads us onto unknown paths of personal evolution and transformation towards more joy and more peace.

This radical inversion that all types of institutions have the tendency to undergo - and even to generate for themselves because of their inner way of functioning - consists in the fact that the normal bottom-up law of life and spontaneity is replaced or at least repressed by top-down authoritarian power that decides what should be. This ill-fated power is not the power of a malefic tyrant but the mere authority of uncontested specialisation.

We can observe how the Yang energy that was meant to structure the process in order to protect it and make it more expressive has turned into a form of over-simplification that represses the original Yin energy of intuition at the expense of a spirit of discovery that fosters meaning. It is also clear that the recessive character of intuition and creativity, when it is confronted to the authority of a dominating power (the one who knows), gives way to this force of destruction, even when the latter is meant to serve the purpose of all people. It is indeed a trait of institutions to claim to reinforce their power in the name of the service they are meant to deliver, especially when this service is faulty.

This acknowledgement leads us to see that institutions can only be made alive and faithful to their mission if they can be dismantled and dis-structured in order to let intuition and bottom-up creativity become again the leading forces.

There is a false belief that dominates our conventional wisdom. This is the belief that the specialist and the authority know better than the people on the shop floor. It is in fact the contrary: the

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people themselves are in touch with their own reality and know it best. They sometimes lack the wider view that would enable them to remedy the ills they are confronted to. But they have nevertheless the basic knowledge through the experience of everyday life. This knowledge is the food for specialists. Without this bottom-up inspiration, specialisation remains dry,

Specialists can only help if they bring their specialised knowledge in complement of this basic user knowledge and not against it. If they do not respect the fundamental intuition of people, who are directly concerned by their own destiny, they will disempower them and impose a false external logic; which may be well justified from a purely narrow and short term technical point of view, but can never be as all-encompassing and creative as any other form of direct concern.

In other words the true life of any group, association or institution relies more on the inspiration, intuition and experience of its own members than on the authority of its specialists.

We need therefore to give back space and protection to the Yin energies that will nourish this spirit of creativity and endeavour. We need also to strictly control and restrict the forces of domination which have the tendency to reduce the complex movement of life to a mere caricature of reality. And we need also to better nourish this elementary spirit of creativity and endeavour.

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

## *Reconnecting with nature as Source or Teacher*

*If we stop considering nature as a heap of resources (Yang) but see her as the great source that feeds and teaches us (Yin), we will find our way on the path to liberation.*

Following the mentality of market that is based on exploitation of anything that can serve its purpose of growth and increase of profit, we just consider nature as a provider of what we need, which we can grab at our convenience. We forget to look at it from a more systemic point of view that reveals itself to us as a complex body of interactions that are all interdependent. We believe we may dominate nature when indeed we are part of it and we belong to it; or more exactly to her. She is indeed the source or father-mother who nourishes us and teaches us the true essence of the laws of life. She is not a god; she is the graspable reality that makes visible what is not visible. She is probably our most precious path to get a glimpse of the mysterious sacredness of life. She reveal what we have to do, in a positive way.

I will only mention here a few points I already developed in the volume about nature, which constitutes the part 1 of the present series of books<sup>16</sup>.

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

But, on the contrary, when we consider nature as the visible part of expression of a whole whose dimensions and mystery we

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<sup>16</sup> See: Yves de Morsier: *Effort and Comfort – Towards reconciliation between nature and humanity*, Desert Creek House Publishing, 2022.  
For more details, look at <http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/alliance/alliance.html>



cannot grasp, we open ourselves to a new relationship with the world in which we live. This new relationship is based on more respect, even on wonder, and on an attitude that is more able to practise true listening. It does not need to impose its own law. But it gets joy in observing the true nature of things. It is in a position to better understand, and fit into, a context that is the direct environment that nourishes us and reveals to us the true laws of life. This other attitude is clearly animated by a Yin energy of acceptance and a spirit of adaptation.

These laws of life are for instance generosity (the fact nature provides everything we need for free), cycles (rhythms of renewal of resources and absorption of wastes), creativity (unlimited inventiveness), intention (more than chance and necessity), intelligence (sophisticated know-how), and many others.

When we awake to this unfathomable reality, the focus of our attention shifts from our own self-constructed world centred on our own needs and projections (World 3) to an all-encompassing view of the context in which we live (World 2). This main shift opens the door to a real adaptation to what is, as it is, instead of pursuing a struggle that puts us in sharp conflict with our environment. This environment is not only the natural frame in which we live. It also includes all other human beings and other forms of sentient beings.

We have first to learn to perceive that there is a Universe that we have to adapt to, because it is the master that defines the frame in which we live. We are not able to change it. The planets circle around the Sun. The sun rises every day. We may then discover the potential of adaptation not as a restriction but on the contrary as a new opening to a very different quality of life. This discovery is based on an apparent contradiction: it provides freedom because it relies on the acceptance of a new constraint!

According to the description of the three worlds I did earlier, nature typically appears as part of World 2 that reveals to us (makes visible) World 1 we cannot see. Nature is an expression of the true essence of life. By observing it we learn about the meaning of life and the forces that rule it, such as the examples of natural laws mentioned above. In listening to it we discover that our own human-made laws we have invented and then accepted and that foster World 3 (the world of our own construct and projections) are false. The way they are in contradiction with the effective laws of World 2 reveals to us the causes of our suffering.

This is precisely how nature makes us free. She liberates us from a false conception and opens us to a new vision of life, to a new anthropology. She shows us how our own laws are based on an inversion of the meaning of life.

Instead of fostering cooperation in diversity and complementarity (as nature does) market and technology impose their laws of competition, standardisation, mechanisation and struggle of one against the other. In becoming aware of the true nature of natural laws (cooperation, diversity, complementarity, evolution toward more consciousness, imagination, creativity) – and in accepting spontaneously their constraint because we are convinced of their authenticity – we may escape the false laws we have established in creating World 3. We become aware that this World 3, which we have fostered in transforming World 2, is characterised by an unjust social and economic system based on premises of exploitation and infinite growth that are not even possible on a finite planet. The acceptance of the constraint of World 2 – because it is indeed an expression of the true nature of World 1 – makes us free from the false constraints of World 3. This is the healing process and the great revolution!

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The good news is that we can readapt the network of our human relationships to the new logic of this new anthropology that gives priority to the laws of nature and of life. We are free from market and technology as imposing forces. We can construct a better social network, based on the premises of equity, creativity, peace, care and respect.

### *The true purpose of the economy*

*Instead of generating growth and profit for a few, the economy has to satisfy basic needs and provide good life conditions for all and care for equity.*

Market is the antithesis of nature but it plays nevertheless a similar role of revelation, also as antithesis.

- As I have just shown, nature reveals to us what the fundamental laws of life are. Nature illustrates (or makes visible) how our true Self is made alive when it relates to the true essence of the source of life (Yin).
- On the contrary, market is making apparent how the world of our projections and illusions transforms everything into a nightmare when we encourage, and base our evolution on, the worse tendencies of humanity. The mechanisms of market reveal in this way the characteristics of our false self (Yang). I believe these tendencies are not an expression of human nature, but rather the negative expressions of disarray when social conditions become a threat for our persons.

Nature reveals the positive way, i.e. the patterns we have to follow or adapt to. In a similar way, the market reveals the negative way, i.e. the trends of our present society that pervert the laws of life and that we have to master and refrain.

I will only mention here a few points I already developed in the volume about economy, which constitutes the part 2 of the present series of books<sup>17</sup>.

Today the most important decisions taken on the political or social levels are related to the priority accorded to the economy or, more exactly, how much no decision dares to challenge the role of the economy we have made so far the fundament of our evolution. “The market says that we cannot afford to...” is the most frequent form of justification of any bad or coward political decision, as if the market were an omnipotent god that would exist as an independent entity and would take revenge if we could dare to turn our back to this false god.

The fundamental question for our western society today is: what is the true role of the economy? This question is fundamental for our future, not because the economy is so central in our destinies, but precisely because it is not so essential; although it has nevertheless today invaded all dimensions of life and has become the major factor that determines our evolution.

What is the role of the economy? There are fundamentally, in my eyes, two possible answers to that question:

- 1) **What we do today:** The role of the economy is to increase production to increase profit to increase growth and wealth - whatever the price of such endeavour can be for the majority of all people, workers and consumers - so that the richest people may invest more and make more profit. It is falsely said, as justification, that the poorest will also have a very small share in this yield. This is called the trickle down

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<sup>17</sup> See: Yves de Morsier: *Vocation and subsistence – Towards reconciliation between simplicity and wealth*, Desert Creek House Publishing, 2023.

For more details, look at

<http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/alliance/alliance.html>

principle, which remains always a promise for the future. The economy is then an aim as such. It leads our society. Infinite growth on a limited planet is its basic rule.

- 2) **What we have to do tomorrow:** The role of the economy is to satisfy the basic needs of all, offer equal and good conditions of life for all. It has to provide work conditions that allow, for each person, the development of creativity and skills, which may generate social recognition for the ones who are generous with their gifts. It has to allow local communities to become places where life can be fully experienced, invented and lived. The economy is then only a means for shared happiness. Care is its rule.

What are then our means today to escape the dreadful future that the unilateral domination of the economy will impose onto us: increase of destruction in social relationships, growing gap between poor and rich, more inequality and injustice leading to more violence, stronger despair for disempowered people (fanaticism, terrorism), increased destruction of nature and increasing imbalances in climatic change, and many others ?

The answer to the question “what to do?” probably resides in the double revelation I have described: nature reveals to us what the fundamental laws of life are and market reveals the trends of destruction we have unleashed.

In other words:

- We need to implement a social frame that will encourage the expression of the laws of life, which nature reveals to us. This is the Yin energy we have to protect. This will provide the best conditions for the expression of our most creative and generous attitudes and aptitudes; equally for all of us.
- On the other hand we have to prevent the development of the trends of market that do not serve the general interest and

generate destruction. This is the Yang energy that dominates and becomes harmful when it is not restricted by its Yin counterpart.

This simple double acknowledgement provides a very simple instruction that we are in fact well capable – here and now - to follow with our relatives, in our own family or with our friends and neighbours. This means that - if we are ready to extend these favourable conditions further to the wider range of our local community - these conditions seem very realistic for any form of local and regional development, which is basically the place where we live; where our life conditions are defined for what matters the most; and where our collective impact at grassroot level is the most efficient.

The necessary condition of success, according to the laws of World 2, is to keep the forces of market in check, under the control of our human priorities. To do this, we need to define rules of equity, justice, care and solidarity and to control that all our collective decisions at local level respond to that requirement of a development that respect human values. This restriction of the forces of market by social choice is simply the fundamental condition. This is then the new priority, which is the inspiring leading energy of humanity that must keep the forces of market in check.

This fundamental rule can be called the law of the pre-eminence of social option over economic forces.

### **The pre-eminence of the social option**

***To take control of its destiny, the local community has to define the conditions that translate the right priorities and preserve them.***

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There are many ways to formulate this rule of the pre-eminence of the social option over economic or material constraints. It expresses simply the conviction that any human group is able to define the right conditions for its own evolution if people who form it are agreeable about what they wish to implement together. This aspiration for a true form of democracy at grassroot level is based on relative consensus and will empower all people in an equal way to master together their common life conditions and evolution.

This rule of basic direct democracy bottom-up has been a long leitmotiv throughout history. Each social theory or each social transformation or revolution had its own way to define the aim of providing people with the power to decide about their own destiny and to control together the social context that would allow to implement the right conditions for the thriving of a form of shared happiness.

Does this endless repetition of the same leitmotiv mean that the attempt is doomed to fail, if it has never brought the felicity that we would expect? I believe on the contrary that this constant aspiration itself for the improvement of justice, equity, peace, care and solidarity has been one of the major forces in history. And this is precisely the energy that will allow this quality to take shape, progressively, if not now, at least on a long term evolution. History in my view has been fostered by this desire for a better world. Of course it rather looks like a leitmotiv that was always and repetitively repressed. But it is in my eyes the energy of life that never surrenders. This haunting repetition proves that life is systematically opposed by ignorance, stupidity, short term views, egocentrism, nastiness, cruelty. The litany calls for a solution, for true liberation. But life arises again and again. It cannot be destroyed.

There is evidently no perfect example of a thriving society that would have cared for all its members and that would have lasted

for centuries in conditions of excellence and perfect peace. Yet there were so many attempts that have proved to be right and convincing. At a smaller or larger scale they can teach us what truly matters. Among many we can mention all local strategies to implement more sustainability and more equity, many local forms of developments especially in poor areas when people seriously become aware of the threat that risks destroying them. On a more general level countries like Bhutan or Finland which consciously aim at more equity and peace, are proofs that the struggle is worth it.

There is for me a rule that is prevalent. Everywhere where people care for the common good and are ready to restrict their own personal privileges in order to create a more righteous society, equality has prevailed that has enabled more people to access education, welfare and peace. Good equal social conditions allow visibly to offer more possibilities of personal development to many more people. Any equal society that cares for all its members has always thrived better than other unequal societies. Statistics prove it<sup>18</sup>.

The great handicap we have, in the way we look back on history, is our own pathological - the word is not too strong! - fascination for power and empires. We are like seduced by any show of might and by domination. By contrast the conditions for shared happiness that would involve all members of a social group appear as very discrete and not impressive rules and efforts that seem to express a form of apparent resignation, a renunciation to grandeur. Equality is evidently not as impressive as extreme luxury, except for the people who experience it!

The necessary choice for modesty remains an option that does not seduce politicians who want to impress, and us with them.

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett: *The spirit level - Why greater equality makes societies stronger*. Bloomsbury Press, New York. 2009.

This is precisely the problem. Politicians or social actors are meant to bring the right solutions and not to promote their own image. Simple citizens have to learn how to resist these false adepts of national grandeur. We are all meant to become servants of a common good that will allow us to thrive. If we want to.

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

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

1) **A new anthropology to be discovered and implemented:**  
The first aspect is that we need to describe the new anthropology that is needed and has to lead us in our choices of a different quality of life, towards the social option. This is a large theme that is very difficult to handle because it overwhelms us and takes us out of our own depth. It is why there is no way to describe a general picture of the model of society we wish to implement. Any similar approach that would paint the big fresco of the ideal setting would fall into utopia. The picture may be beautiful but the way to make it the reality of everyday would be pure theory.

The right answer is then rather the direct discovery of these leading threads of anthropology we, as a community, will elaborate together in a common search for the right conditions. This is a very pragmatic path: the social option step by step. There is no ready-made answer for this. But we know it happens here and now. Today.

2) **A consensus and a commitment to respect the common rules agreed upon:** The second aspect we become aware of is the importance that this social option and expression of collective awareness have to be the fruit of a relative consensus of which the necessary conditions have to be implemented and protected if we want to provide good conditions for the practice of equality and care for one another.

Obviously the progress on this path will not be smooth. Awkwardness, ignorance, lack of experience, false understanding, conflicts of interests, and so on, will evidently not make the path of any alternative society easy. But this basic option for equality, if it is real, will nevertheless open this path. This common choice can only be effective if there is a common agreement - a minimum of consensus on the main issues – and also a personal commitment of each participant to respect the priorities, conditions, rules and restrictions that have been put into place and agreed upon.

The social option defines therefore a fundamental social frame: first because it brings people on the path of consensus, unifying their effort toward a noble path that makes them aware of what the priorities are; and secondly because it channels all energies toward a positive aim, with a personal commitment to respect the rules and constraints that have been defined as necessary conditions of success.

These two characteristics are the major aspects of the social option. It depends only on us whether to start implementing this new path. This can only happen when we are convinced it is needed and we are ready to make the effort.

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I have described this strategy at length in one of my previous books<sup>19</sup> and I do not want to repeat here the same considerations. This topic of the right strategy is essential. Yet it is not exactly the theme of the present book. The present topic is the necessity to favour Yin energies, to protect them and to restrain the Yang energies that repress them. The strategy will illustrate how the values that sustain it are very much of Yin inspiration. That is what matters so far.

But the challenge remains complete that we have to give a voice to these Yin energies. This requires a commitment from us, and the effort to stick to it. Happiness has a cost. Are we ready to “pay” with our own commitment? Or do we prefer to continue inflicting the same old harm of destruction upon ourselves and others?

This is our choice.

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<sup>19</sup> See: Yves de Morsier: *The solution is simple... but demanding – A strategy for change and a search for meaning*. Desert Creek House Publishing, 2021. For more details, look at <http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/alliance/alliance.html>

## Chapter 5: A Yin – Yang catalogue

In contrast with the two precedent volumes of this series, I will not propose here 10 commitments that intend to summarise the content of the book, as I did in these two other volumes. But I will simply enumerate some possible behaviours that combine both Yin and Yang energies in a creative balance of recessive and dominant attitudes. This will be a kind of catalogue of possible behaviours necessary to drastically change the way we live.

Of course this catalogue will not be complete. It cannot be as it is an infinite list of all possible attitudes that can be creative. It is just the start of a long and endless enumeration. I prefer this way of doing because, as I have explained, it would be wrong to try to design a perfect utopia that would remain beautiful on paper but would not take shape concretely in our daily life, for the simple reason that it would remain a utopia. I believe that the catalogue is a suitable form to suggest possibilities of behaviours that have to inspire people (us) and motivate them (us) to act in this way and spirit.

The catalogue has no special structure and no order, except a few subtitles. It is just a “heap” of disparate items on different levels of importance. They appear in this catalogue as the principles in the bottle stand that I mentioned earlier. They can be changes, exchanges, removed or added at will without the whole system collapsing. Some concern rather details, other are more general. This form of apparent disorder is representative of what one may call the messiness of life. Life (like the bottle stand) is not a coherent process that we can plan. It rather happens in us than we manage it properly. Hence this disparity of elements and

qualities that compose this long list seem to be adequate, more suitable than a planned order that never can take shape because it exists more in our heads than in our hearts.

Let's try now to invent this catalogue. The list is evidently endless. It will only be partly fed by the material we have examined previously because I want to avoid excessive repetitions. It will mainly add new aspects that just need to be mentioned here shortly, without special development or comment. You are invited to extend this catalogue in your own way, according to the specific situation in which you live.

The catalogue is made of statements that describe mainly Yin attitudes because its purpose is to reinforce their presence in our way of living. These statements present principally a Yin approach, but they are also inked with my own philosophy of life. You don't need to agree with me. The purpose is to challenge you and to generate a form of general questioning of our priorities and preferences. I hope you will respond to this challenge and be thrilled to engage on this creative path.

### Listening and welcoming

- **We have two ears and one mouth:** This teaches us to listen to others twice as much as we talk to them. Twice, this means once to what they express, and once to what they do not express.
- **Silence:** Silence is a very precious treasure that is difficult to protect from external aggressions. May we practise regular times of silence in our private life: in nature, alone, contemplating the landscape or animals, in meditation. Silence as source of peace and calm, as insight into who we are and what our life consists in.

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- **Hospitality:** Knowing how to welcome the other or the stranger is the most precious sign of inclusiveness and compassion we can express. Inviting into our home the stranger we meet on the street, sharing our meals with friends at a table, creating an intimate community of hospitality. As they say in Islam, the stranger is a messenger of Allah.
- **Conviviality:** Conviviality – which literally means “living with” – is the art of living together, of being invited around the same table where we share the same meal, of being involved together in common destiny. The essential of our living experience consists in these deeper relationships we develop when we live a convivial life. Therefore we need to reduce as much as possible the use of special tools and money because they impact on, and reduce our relationships. Too often, these tools or money tend to prevent relationships when they allow us to become self-sufficient. They mean: I do not need your help; I do not need you because I can do this by myself.
- **Friendship:** More than having a good time together (a drink, a chat, a show, a swim, leisure time), friendship consists in getting involved in each other’s life, at the measure that the other wishes it to be. Accompanying a suffering friend is much more demanding than having just fun together. May we not be too shy to dare to cross the line of intimacy.
- **Dialogue:** When we meet with people of very different backgrounds, it is essential that we may engage into a true dialogue that leaves space to each one to express their deepest views. Another image takes then shape that goes much beyond individual stands and encompasses a much wider description of reality. This is true dialogue that, like a mosaic, draws a complex picture by addition of small contributions. This is the path to true community, where consensus can take shape because of this incredible quality of

listening of one to another. Common wealth develops (the Commons) because it is shared and accessible to all.

- **Identity or race:** Identity is fluid and evolves all the time. Belonging to a social group (ethnic, culture, race, class, religion) does not define identity. Belonging is partly because of similarities but also because of differences and complementarities. I belong to the same community as you because we have different skills, perceptions, interpretations. We are all hybrids. Although they exist as patterns, races are never pure. They are always at the crossing of many influences. By miscegenation there is continuity from one race to the next, from one culture to the next. Practising hybridisation offers a rich potential for recomposing cultures. Searching for identity in an inclusive way opens to external influences. Well defined paddocks are an illusion that feeds fundamentalism. May we dismantle fences.

## Generosity and passing on

- **Everything is given:** Life, air, water, love, knowledge, skills are not ours. They are free gifts of nature and community. Taking care of them, nourishing them, developing them, sharing them and passing them on, if possible after having enriched them, are ways to let our true wealth flow freely and enrich all.
- **Time and money:** We have only a limited time of life, 24h a day and 7 days a week. We have also only the limited skills we have been able to develop. Doing the best we can with them, in the span of available time, is our creativity that calls us to not use money as an artificial means to get more than we can, according to these limited measures of our own life. Remember: money is only a means for exchange. It should



not increase our purchasing power. The poor Malian farmer has as much skills as I. Why then should I get more than he does?

- **Takers and leavers:** We have become consumers and takers. We take what we want, until our context is exhausted. Learning to live in a circular economy that returns to the context what it has fed us with teaches us to become a leaver (i.e. considering what natural equilibrium requires or what others need) or a giver, a provider of gifts.
- **Categories of goods:** One should distinguish 4 categories of goods. 1) The goods that are not divisible: climate, natural equilibriums, natural systems (land, rivers, forests, oceans, mountains, deserts), natural resources. 2) The goods and qualities that only can become real if they are shared: justice, peace, love. 3) The goods that multiply when they are shared: education, know-how, knowledge, wisdom. 4) The goods that diminish when they are shared (divided): a cake. Respecting these categories and feeding them (especially 1-3) multiplies the fruits of our efforts.
- **Simplicity:** Choosing what matters truly for us in life, and not getting side-tracked by other offers. When growing in maturity, learning to distinguish what our main needs are and concentrating on them. These essential needs become fewer and fewer but each one will be ever more essential to our happiness. True needs are rarely centred on our persons. They in general involve relationships with others and are turned towards them. Simplicity helps us to get rid of the superfluous and lets us see the essential. It fosters humility (recognising one's limits) and vulnerability (being open to the unknown). This is what St Clare used to call the "privilege of poverty".

- **Will and grace:** We need our willingness to be committed to what matters most. But wilfulness imprisons us in stubborn behaviours. Grace is the energy that nourishes us, because it is freely given and it is modulated on the laws of life. It is not something we take; we can only receive it. Finding the right balance between will and grace. It is a fragile equilibrium that never stops escaping; like walking, it is a chain of states of imbalance from one foot to the other.

### Heritage, culture, ideology and truth

- **Treasures of heritage:** We live in a society that has accumulated a lot of knowledge and wisdom through the past centuries. This heritage teaches us what our ancestors have learned. Of course it is not perfect. It has been deformed by our human weaknesses (will for power and control, fear of life). May we go back to the core of this teaching, get rid of its twists, and learn from it; reinterpret it in our own creative way; share with others what we or they have discovered.
- **Circular and linear:** We need to learn to think not only in linear but also in circular ways. 1) Linear or rational: the way of Western thinking that rationally progresses from one premise to the next, from one deduction to the next, and finally to a conclusion. 2) Circular or mythical: the traditional way that revisits again and again the same theme but under a slightly different perspective, using symbols, like a bird of prey that, in a spiral, surveys the same place but rises higher and higher and gains in overview. Let's learn to combine both ways because they are complementary.
- **Memory:** Observing what happens around us, how the community functions; discerning the main trends, evaluating what brings life; remembering the teachings of experience,

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the lessons of the past. And, with all this, inventing a new future; reinforcing the energies that bring life.

- **Ideology:** Discerning the positive and negative values or priorities that lead our community or nation; understanding ideology as a frame that forges the mentality and the forms of together-living of a people, whether they are totalitarian or market oriented. Giving expression to more convivial values when material priorities repress humanity. Practising what we believe is true. Creating a positive ideology that stimulates respect and recognition of persons, inclusiveness, diversity, complementarity, generosity.
- **Resistance and resilience:** Knowing how to resist evil but not as an opposition, because we would have to adapt to its own strategies and weapons. Resisting rather by our own resilience and our ability to be ourselves. Non-violence is more performing on long term; it proposes authentic ways to end conflicts.
- **Living in the truth<sup>20</sup>:** Not conforming to what is expected of us if it does not seem right. Practising according to the truth that takes shape in our private inner sphere. Being aware of our possible empowerment, as the power of the powerless, when we conform to truth.
- **One choice = one vote:** Remembering that each choice we make (goods, services, values, attitudes) is, each time, a vote for this good, this service, this value, this attitude, i.e. a personal affirmation that these qualities are life-giving. Being the change we want to see in the world (Gandhi). Our

empowerment is at the measure of our influence, and reciprocally, it means small but consistent.

- **Loving what is:** Questioning our thoughts; seeing how they are the fruits of our own projections. Learning to love what is, for what it is truly. Our role is not to shape the world but to respond to circumstances in the appropriate way, if possible in a spirit of peace, joy and compassion. We are active witnesses, visible signs of life. Life is here and now, not something to achieve in future. It is more an experience to wonder at than a project to implement.

## Search for meaning

- **A Mystery:** A Will or Presence or Intention seems to lead the evolution of the Universe towards more complexity, more depth, more explicit meaning, more consciousness. If not, how could so complex forms of life have arisen, even in 14 billion years? Chance and probability do not suffice to explain this deep evolution. And the expression or visibility of this Presence translates itself from Word 1 into World 2 or World 3 (as explained earlier). This Source remains a Mystery, despite everything one can say to describe it. Life seems to be the means to discover what it is; and to call us to live fully this search of the Mystery.
- **Search for Meaning:** This search for the Mystery is also search for the meaning of life. What matters most? We need to go on this endless search. Although it is uncertain, it leads to the core of what life is meant to be, without yet to be able to be defined clearly. More than anything else this question seems much essential to our happiness and for us to be able to live to the full. Here a few examples of people who intensively searched for meaning.

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<sup>20</sup> Read the beautiful text by Vaclav Havel (the ex President of Czechoslovakia): *The power of the powerless*. To be downloaded from: <http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/powerless.pdf>

- **Example 1 – Viktor Frankl<sup>21</sup> - meaning:** Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who survived the suffering of concentration camp in WW2. His testimony shows that the meaning one can see in one's life (e.g. resisting evil or seeing one's children again or finishing an important task) was, in such extreme adversity, an essential factor of his survival. It provided him with the strength to resist suffering, desolation and despair.
- **Example 2 – Etty Hillesum<sup>22</sup> - bliss:** Etty Hillesum was a young Dutch woman who lived through German occupation in Holland in WW2 and died in Auschwitz. Her dairy shows how she could remain in state of peace and joy and wonder of life, even in the worst times in the concentration camp of Westerbork where she was supporting other prisoners.
- **Example 3 – Ewa Mozes Kor<sup>23</sup> - forgiveness:** Ewa Mozes Kor was the survivor of twin girls who were subjected to the cruel experiences of Dr Mengele in Auschwitz. After the war she went through an astonishing process that led her to forgive her torturers, and even Dr Mengele. She described how forgiveness has worked for her as a personal liberation.
- **Example 4 – Thibirine<sup>24</sup> - giving oneself:** Thibirine is a monastery in Algeria (Atlas) where Cistercian monks were living in narrow community with local Muslim people. In 1996, the GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé - a fundamentalist organisation in Algeria) abducted and killed 8 of these monks. Only 2 survived. This is the testimony of people who decided to stay in Algeria and to share the destiny of the local people because they felt that this was where they belonged, knowing very well that they were exposing themselves to being killed, as these extremist groups were especially aiming at foreigners.
- **Life as transformation:** Life is not an aim, it is a process; a process of never ending transformation of ourselves. Although it is not to be looked for, suffering cannot be avoided if we intend to live a true life. It becomes inevitably a main force of our own constant transformation that opens us to a deeper perception of what is. Nothing is permanent and we are meant to follow (aspire to) our personal evolution towards higher maturity and deeper consciousness. Yet we are not the doers. It is graciousness.
- **Incarnation:** We are spiritual beings having a human experience (as Teilhard de Chardin wrote). Our life consists in finding the right ways of investigation into the Mystery and of translation of meaning (expression) into our visible material context. Matter and Spirit are not opposed; they work together to make the invisible reality visible.

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<sup>21</sup> Read the testimony by Victor Frankl about his time in concentration camp: Viktor Frankl: *Man's search for Meaning*, many different publishers.

<sup>22</sup> Read Etty Hillesum: *An Interrupted Life + Letters from Westerbork*, Henry Holt & Cie, NY, 1996, or other publishers.

<sup>23</sup> Read Ewa Mozes Kor: *The Power of Forgiveness*, Central Recovey Press, Las Vegas, 2021.

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<sup>24</sup> Watch the film *Of Gods and Men* that tells this true story, or read the Testament of Christian de Chergé and other quotations: <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/grieving/christian-de-charge-a-story-of-forgiveness> or, in French, Christian de Chergé: *L'invincible espérance*, Bayard – Centurion, 1998.

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- **Wonder of life:** We tend to concentrate on our projects, to care whether we are successful. It is fine, we need to be active and effective. Yet, doing this, we probably miss the essential. We let us escape the fact that life is a miracle as such. It is not a means to achieve something. It is the purpose itself. Breathing in, breathing out, hearing, seeing, feeling, being aware. There is no other program. Then life can be mere wonder. It is not about what we do or get, it is how we experience what is and what happens to us. We are not so much the actors as the receivers, the beneficiaries of what is given to us. Life happens to us more than we master it. Life is the actor and we are the objects and witnesses. This is well the exact contrary of what we tend to believe. Instead of being fully Yang, we try then to come back to more Yin, to better listening. And not only this; there is in fact much more to it. This is truly not about life as our own life experience, but it is a common endeavour of all of us as a wider body of sentient beings, humans, animals, plants, galaxies... This is not an individual experience. We are all parts of the same whole. It is why it is so important that we learn to care for, and share with, one another. We all depend on each other, as one single body. There is one pulse although there are many hearts.
- **And many others...**

We will stop here this enumeration of Yin statements. I leave you to continue the list and look for the right ways to translate them into daily life. You can start from the list of options at the end of this book and write the statements that correspond to the material we have examined in these pages. You can write your own list of statements and try to translate them into daily life. Or reflect on these themes with friends. I believe it is a question of life and death, because it concerns how much we leave space for life to unfold.

**In a nutshell:** We can probably do a summary of all what has been said, in a nutshell. When we do our possible to favour Yin attitudes, give them more space for expression and protect them from being overruled or repressed or squashed, we try to rediscover this subtle and discrete energy of life that is so mysterious and fragile, so central to our being. It can never be grasped but it is yet always active, as long as there is space for it.

We open then a space of gentleness, of grace, of generosity that is encompassed by one major energy of life: love. We are then in touch with what nourishes us and keeps us alive. Love is truly the experience of life itself. And life is the experience of love itself.

Maybe it is the summary of what matters most. And this is a Yin quality. Now, how do we practise and translate this fabulous search and incarnation into daily living?

## List of options (titles and short wordings)

This complementary table of contents is different from the one at the beginning of the book; it presents a detailed list of all the options proposed in this manifesto.

Remember what has been explained in the introduction: this book has proposed a range of successive key statements that represent proposed patterns for a change of behaviours. These patterns are the expressions of an alternative understanding of our society and, as such, provide powerful incentives for change. As they open to new choices, they represent many options that consist in a personal or collective choice (or commitment) that depends on us alone and the way we want to interact with the world.

Each option is made of a title and a short summary in two or three lines. They are organised here by chapters and sub-chapters, in the same order they have been presented; with the page number as reference.

### CHAPTER 1: THE GENDER EXPERIENCE **12**

#### **Complementarity, specialisation, hierarchy** **12**

##### **From the difference to the hierarchy** **12**

The gender difference defines a complementarity of two equal genders. But the social construct creates a hierarchy and imposes rules of behaviour. **12**

##### **The social hierarchy and more contrasts** **13**

The social construct creates a hierarchy between the tasks, which defines a hierarchy between people. It stipulates the rules that confirm this new order and cares for its enforcement. **13**

##### **The gender paradox: biological or social** **14**

In our social construct we have forgotten that it is mainly gender that fosters genetically a fundamental difference of life experience. **14**

#### **Two natures – two experiences** **15**

##### **Two contrasting experiences** **15**

Pregnancy teaches women the art of introverted attention and predisposition for caring; while the male partner develops extroverted skills as provider of structure. **15**

##### **Yin and Yang** **16**

Feminine and masculine qualities are complementary to one another; they always mingle and combine in infinite ways. Each one, independently of gender, is free to practise them. **16**

##### **Yin or feminine qualities** **18**

Motherhood is the expression of Yin energy that encompasses feminine qualities, providing life, gentleness, care and understanding. **18**

##### **Yang or masculine qualities** **19**

Fatherhood is the expression of Yang that encompasses masculine qualities, providing structure, strength, leadership and expression. **19**

##### **Yin and Yang archetypes** **20**

Yin and Yang qualities rarely exist as such; like femininity and masculinity they are poles of attraction of our behaviour or archetypes that impregnate our lives. **20**

##### **Poles and combinations** **22**

Yin and Yang are never pure; they appear always in combinations with their antagonistic feature. It is how equilibrium may arise. **22**

##### **Aptitudes and attitudes** **23**

Yang is rather shown in aptitudes (skills or abilities to act) while Yin is rather shown in attitudes (ways of being or understanding). **23**

## Recessive and dominant

### Competition, dominance and cooperation 25

#### The power of giving birth vs the feeling of threat 25

The Yin feminine power of giving birth is perceived by masculinity as subversive because it creates life and develops in a hidden place. 25

#### Strength vs resilience 26

Yang is linked with strength and control of external conditions; it dominates Yin resilience that is an inner hidden force. 26

#### Control and dominance vs life and subversion 27

Sense of exclusion, fear of the subversive power of life and tendency to dominance translate into the masculine trend to control or override femininity. 27

#### Mary and John the Baptist 28

Femininity means understanding, i.e. deepening of the meaning of life. Masculinity means expression, i.e. acting out of this mystery. 28

#### The myth of the Garden of Eden 30

Two possible ways of living: either stealing the fruit, or following the path of our own growth, which allows in us the marriage of both femininity and masculinity. 30

#### Dominant and recessive 33

By analogy with biology, masculinity may be said to be a dominant character and feminine a recessive one. Yet they are both essential. 33

#### Control, oppression and protection – 5 ways 35

The antinomy between Yin and Yang opens five different ways: control, exploitation, repression, self-restraint or cultivation. 35

#### Abortion of the feminine 38

Paradoxically a major characteristic of our modern society is that we give priority to Yang dominant values over Yin recessive ones. 38

## CHAPTER 2: YANG DOMINATING OVER YIN 41

### Gender roles 41

#### Roles according to genders 41

Privileges, power and preferences participate to define social roles, based on gender identities, in a whole range between conformism and exclusion. 41

#### The essence of power 44

There are not so many women in positions of institutional power as there are men. This is not only due to restriction of access but also to the nature of power women wish to exercise. 44

#### Women's liberation movement 45

Women's liberation has broken open a vicious circle of false representations / situations of oppression. It has empowered us all. 45

#### Gender specialisation 48

In traditional societies social roles are defined according to gender but this does not create a hierarchy of values between people. 48

#### The unisex issue 50

Our trade system has uniformed our ways of being, disconnecting them from our own personality which is linked with our gender. 50

#### Gender as social option 52

Our distance from instinctive nature has allowed cultural patterns to generate social forms that may offer richer expressions of truth. 52

### Gender as identity 54

#### Gender as natural expression or social construct 54

We have to find the right balance between the natural determination of gender and its social or personal interpretation. 54

#### 1) Essence or experience 55

There are probably two main possible causes to same sex relationships: 1) a discovery of one's own essence, or 2) a negative experience in heterosexual relationships. 55

## List of options (titles and short wordings)

<b>2) Marriage, union, vocation, love</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>5) Industrial Revolution and loss of being</b>	<b>70</b>
It is essential to allow union for LGBTQIA+ but it does not need to be done in the same terms as for “straight” marriages. It is different.	56	The exclusive focus on material production and profit has destroyed our ability to experience how life consists in just being.	70
<b>3) The rights of children in same sex unions</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>6) Imperialism and the loss of community</b>	<b>70</b>
As it does not flow from nature, the integration of children in a same sex union implies responsibilities and explicit constraints or obligations for the couple.	57	Exploitation imposes the law of individualism and destroys our sense of belonging to, and caring freely for, a wider community.	70
<b>Gender and self-obsession</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>7) Globalisation and the loss of empowerment</b>	<b>72</b>
Identity according to gender has become, in our Western rich society, such a powerful and all-invading worry that it often becomes destructive as a form of self-obsession.	59	The globalisation of market has generated an anonymous economic system that focuses on things and makes people locally powerless.	72
<b>Gender in a nutshell</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>Yin as synthesis and integration</b>	<b>74</b>
Gender is like race. There is a small physical difference that is superseded by a dominating social construct or interpretation. Yet one remains free to express one’s own gender as one wants.	62	These 7 stages reveal a lack of synthesis of each new discovery with heritage; a function of Yin attitudes that need to be protected.	74
<b>Masculinisation through history</b>	<b>63</b>	<b><u>CHAPTER 3: THE PATH OF LIBERATION</u></b>	<b>75</b>
<b>7 stages of masculinisation</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>The core of the crisis in a nutshell</b>	<b>75</b>
Our human history and evolution is characterised by a constant development, by stages, of the domination of Yang over Yin values.	63	<b>Linear or circular</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>1) Agriculture and the loss of the book of teaching</b>	<b>64</b>	In a society of overproduction and overconsumption there are no cycles. We take what we want without feeding back the context that nourishes us.	75
Domination over nature prevents us from listening to its generous teaching about the essence of life and adapting humbly to its laws.	64	<b>The community dimension</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>2) Aristotelianism, Scholastic and the loss of mythical thinking</b>	<b>65</b>	Nowadays we act as individuals or takers. Yet we all depend on one another for our survival. It is highly time to think / act in terms of community.	76
Domination of rationality prevents us from being receptive to the unfathomable truth expressed by symbolical or mythical teaching.	65	<b>The plague of distraction and entertainment</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>3) Renaissance and the loss of sacredness</b>	<b>67</b>	We spend ever more time in front of screens, looking for distraction in entertainment at the expense of our own liveliness and creativity.	77
Domination of scientific thinking generates an illusion of being all-powerful, at the expense of a search for the sacred mystery.	67	<b>Friendship as involvement in real life</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>4) Colonisation and the loss of humanity</b>	<b>68</b>	Relationships are the building blocks of life. They mean we are involved in one another’s life as far as it is requested by each other.	78
The domination of other races and cultures imposes an artificial hierarchy between peoples, which distorts our common humanity.	68	<b>A vision in consensus</b>	<b>79</b>
		When community takes shape in the hands of its members, it has to be guided by a common vision, fruit of the best possible consensus.	79

## Recessive and dominant

<b>The indestructible energy of Life</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>Focus (Yang) and attention (Yin)</b>	<b>97</b>
Materialism can repress the expression of Life but Life can never be destroyed. It remains the energy that will bring us back to Life.	81	As we have learned mainly to solve single problems our mind focusses on details and loses its ability for attention to the whole.	97
<b>A need for a new anthropology</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>A new strategy</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>The path of liberation</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>The systematic questioning of our thoughts</b>	<b>98</b>
The deep change of mentality (mind turn-around) is: what was despised (Yin) becomes the leading value (the corner stone) to be implemented (Yang).	81	Our mind never stops producing new thoughts and bits of knowledge. We need to question these thoughts and free ourselves from them.	98
<b>True debate</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>Loving what is</b>	<b>99</b>
Secularism is a radical form of active censorship. It prevents us from sharing our deepest values in order to define the priorities of a common social project.	83	Byron Katie proposes a method in four questions and a “turn-around” that help us to question our thoughts and see clearly our the trick us and prevent us from loving what is.	99
<b>Dialogue as a mosaic</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>Process and result</b>	<b>101</b>
Dialogue creates a new perception that arises by addition of many diverse contributions. Only together may they form a new picture.	84	Western linear cultures tend to focus on the product (result). Traditional circular cultures care for the quality of the process.	101
<b><u>CHAPTER 4: COMPLEMENTARITY - A RETURN TO LIFE</u></b>	<b><u>86</u></b>	<b>Institution and intuition</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>The marriage of the feminine and the masculine</b>	<b>86</b>	Institutions structure our lives but the true source of life remains in the intuitions that animate the structure, from emptiness to form.	103
<b>Perception (Yin) and expression (Yang)</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>Life as bottom-up movement</b>	<b>105</b>
Any form of expression needs to be rooted in awareness of the deeper meaning of life: a sacred private space that needs protection.	86	Institutions can only be revived in their deeper meaning if they let people inspire them, in a bottom-up movement that gives expression to creativity and diversity (complexity).	105
<b>Nurturing (Yin) and structuring (Yang)</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>Reconnecting with nature as Source or Teacher</b>	<b>106</b>
Rooted in the ground of being the seed needs to be first nurtured. It then needs a supporting structure, between emptiness and form.	89	If we stop considering nature as a heap of resources (Yang) but see her as the great source that feeds and teaches us (Yin), we will find our way on the path to liberation.	106
<b>Emptiness (Yin) and form (Yang)</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>The true purpose of the economy</b>	<b>108</b>
Form both reveals and hides the deep meaning of Emptiness, which reveals the content of form that has to dissolve. Both are essential.	91	Instead of generating growth and profit for a few, the economy has to satisfy basic needs and provide good life conditions for all and care for equity.	108
<b>Innocence (Yin) and knowledge (Yang)</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>The pre-eminence of the social option</b>	<b>109</b>
Our Western society has taught us to believe in knowledge. Despite its creativity knowledge dissolves innocence. Both are necessary.	94	To take control of its destiny, the local community has to define the conditions that translate the right priorities and preserve them.	109



<b><u>CHAPTER 5: A YIN – YANG CATALOGUE</u></b>	<b><u>113</u></b>
<b>Listening and welcoming</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Generosity and passing on</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Heritage, culture, ideology and truth</b>	<b>115</b>
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