

Manifesto for a convivial society

1- Building our common world further but differently

The human activities have built and are still building and maintaining societies, living in Nature to turn it into a common world. The modalities of these activities, the manner in which they are organised, form a tool (multiple, with both tangible and intangible components) which contributes, by its characteristics, to determine some of the "qualities" of these societies, of their present and future working, and of their insertion in territories of our planet, within this universe which shelters our common humanity.

After millions of years of deployment in archipelagos, the humanity was gathered and shattered by the pluri-secular work of modernisation with a universalistic vocation, initiated in Europe, asserted with the Enlightenment, on Judeo-Greco-Christian roots. The liberation of the individual energies and the government of the people by the people have formed a new paradigm of organisation summed up by the slogan of the free market associated with democracy, a paradigm which has diffused around the globe and tends to assert itself everywhere in the name of the human rights and of the material benefits promised by globalisation.

From this type of organisation emerged a dynamic which got out of hand and whose uncontrolled components will lead humanity to its loss if it cannot change not only the speed, but first and foremost the direction thereof. This requires reforming the processes currently at work and triggering radical changes without throwing away everything modernisation has provided. It has enabled to go beyond the liberticidal and antidemocratic obscurantism of some archaic societies ; all the individuals should enjoy some autonomy in front of traditions to avoid the risk of fundamentalism which leads to fossilisation when they exert an arbitrary and/or religious social control on the people outside any participative democratic process. Modernisation has also enabled the boom of creativity and the arrival of techniques improving objectively the quality and the quantity of life, thereby saving from so-called natural calamities ; selections and reorientations are necessary while pursuing the processes which, without pervert effects, enable to escape from the material and moral indigence still inflicted upon numerous populations.

The radical changes are essential, principally because the processes at play under the paradigm of market democracy have generated a tool which has eventually become hypertrophied. Instead of serving humanity, this tool enslaves it by focusing its endeavours towards an objective of unlimited growth. Although its proselytes claim it has been acting along the initially defined lines of democracy and of free market, it had, at the end of the day, to break away from its founding principles so as to meet this objective.

2- Sharing in society and rejecting the illusion of the "always more"

The progression towards steadily greater production, a condition for gradually driving prosperity for all has become, from a certain threshold, an illusion. The peoples of the

societies who have gone beyond this threshold, pursue limitless dreams, leaving them with never satiated desires ; the material comfort of the "middle classes" and individual freedom without taboos, do not bring happiness but dissatisfaction. In "rich" societies, relative indigence (that of the unemployed and of the precarious workers) and absolute indigence (that of the excluded, homeless, without social cover) could not be eradicated. Inequalities between the poorest and the richest increase. The projects of switching to an advanced stage of globalisation have in fact turned into paving the way for a so-called knowledge era which is elitist, with biogenetics, cyber and trans-humanity for a happy few mainly in rich countries. They could be joined by certain upper classes in the emerging countries (China, India, Brazil etc...). These countries are still below the threshold up to where large populations can still and must be extracted from poverty thanks to the growth of production. However, inequalities explode in those countries. At the world level, let us keep in mind that, on the one hand, the populations below the survival threshold remain since the seventies of the order of one billion people, distributed a little everywhere but especially in the non-emerging countries (in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa), and that, on the other hand, trying to catch up in poor countries with the average consumption conditions of the rich countries is becoming explicitly illusory ; the rich have already exhausted the planet which cannot take it any longer : 5 to 6 times more natural resources would be necessary to extend their average consumption standard to all humanity. Not to mention the irretrievable degradations inflicted on this planet ; they are the fruit of the illusion of mastering Nature, by claiming superiority to the archaic societies who used to respect it, an illusion lasting among the ones who still hope for a technical transition towards cyber-humanity.

For want of changing direction, humanity will destroy itself or will be reduced to an elite perched on a new arch. A change of direction requires a widespread agreement for a self-limitation of production growth and to set up an organisation, which will not rely upon growth to perform a fair distribution of the benefits from human activity.

3- Setting up a free and open democracy promoting the collective good

For humanity to be able to change direction radically before it perceives the deafening signs of an imminent catastrophe, the mobilisation of civil society must still be going from strength to strength so as to weigh in sufficiently on the change of processes. Everywhere, States are hand in glove with the powers organising the endless growth of merchant production. Including in the rich and proselyte countries of market democracy, democracy tends to shrink to a system, on the one hand, of periodic elections of the people's representatives taken from the same small group of politicians and, on the other hand, of extended individual freedoms in a world swamped with brainwashing messages. The State has itself become a tool of unreasonable size but rationalised and the government of men has left room to the governance of things according to the principles of market efficiency. Elections have to compete with opinion polls which guide the leaders longing for power and their campaigns are orchestrated by spin doctors with slogan which tend to turn them into political "products" bearing their "party" tags. Almost everywhere, oligarchies, often technicians, grasp, sometimes at their turn, the control of these States. We are far from an openness for a free involvement of the people and far from a people's government by the people, guided by a moral and political philosophy. We are equally just as far from a free market.

The last major company which was dismembered pursuant to the laws in favour of competition was AT&T in 1984 : humanity (and markets) are now controlled, in a quasi monopolistic manner, by Google, Microsoft and Apple, Monsanto and, in an oligopolistic way, by a few firms in most sectors of immaterial and material production, media, banks, electronics, chemistry, automotive, pharmacy, etc. Their gigantism does not rest on any serious technical, economic or political rationale (but justifies the State's support since *too big to fail*). The underlying driving force of their occurrence is the search for increased profit for the shareholders who, to secure their prerogatives, grant tremendous remunerations to their appointed executives. They must hence be dismembered ; it is the best way for the productions to be more in compliance with the needs of the largest number of people as well as with collective interest and for their top executives to come back to lower, reasonable and fair remunerations which may still be relatively high according to the services rendered. All things considered, democracy is not the usual operating mode in companies. The monopolies we should refuse are also the radical monopolies, those which compel us for example to use a car in many cities or which would impose eating GMO foodstuffs exclusively. The indispensable choice of an absolute priority given to public transports, the ban of non specific usage of automotive vehicles in cities, supporting the use of bikes, the extension of biological agriculture etc... are choices whose importance is at least as major as that of non-smoking now becoming enforced almost everywhere in rich countries. To be content with little is an ethos of simplicity universally known, also associated with Lao Tse in China or Zen Buddhism in Japan. In front of a dominant model which is an oligarchic democracy at the service of a monopolistic market it is relevant to set up a free and open democracy promoting the collective good.

4- Organising the “well-living together”

The establishment of such a true democracy rests on everyone being able to exert a responsible citizenship which directly takes part at different levels, and through elected representatives, in the management and the definition of the collective good and hence the review of the directions and of the processes. For want of being able to found such policy on the sacred and the immanent, it must still come across as just and fair. The first requirement is that of belonging to the same common humanity, that is to say the humans acknowledge one another as belonging to the group : this involves organising a decent life for everyone and hence first of all securing unconditional access for all to the satisfaction of the essential needs, with a contingent monetary consequence. The primary social link, present in archaic societies and founded on the threefold obligation of giving, receiving and giving back must be restored or rather acknowledged once again, so as to maintain said common humanity ; the feeling of justice and fairness will be able to form the basis of loyalty as regards the collective decisions made after deliberation in a public space of peaceful confrontation. Such imperative should be adhered to at all levels, locally, nationally and internationally.

The project of a convivial society is to give priority to society and to be done with the historical disorder caused by the priority given to economy. This means in particular not only, expressed in monetary terms, an unconditional minimum income for all, but more widely speaking, taking into consideration first and foremost what really counts, i.e. life (*there is no wealth but life* [John Ruskin, who inspired Gandhi

]) and not what is counted in monetary terms by the markets or pseudo-markets. The sense of share and cooperation must guide the distribution of the goods essential to living together when they are not distributed at the very time of their creation as they often are within the family framework or by the gifts of Nature : the education of children at school is an extension, organised collectively, of the parental education and further translates in information and knowledge sharing ; public lighting is a similar extension of the sun's benefits, as anything which does up our common living conditions. Both these examples define public goods for collective usage. Food (through agriculture in particular) and housing are goods equally essential to life, and even if used more individually, must be treated apart from ordinary commodities. Such is the meaning of caring for one another ; in our various activities, we must also take care of Nature, as a whole, which is the source of all life, called common patrimony or similar and which we must take into account. The regulation of the activities which may degrade it irremediably cannot be left to market or pseudo-market mechanisms.

5- Organising the “well-working together”

The ambition of a convivial society is to reconsider any human activity in its dimension as a creative activity (either a prosaic or artistic activity), exerted autonomously, and supplying resources which contribute for their own part to feed the life of society. We would be happier if we could "*work together and care for each other*" (Illich, 1973, p.50), it is a survival condition of humanity. Society needs the creative activity of men and of Nature to live on. Sharing presupposes creation, along a logic of the working or "doing and living together" and not that of an activity solely focused on getting something for oneself (what good is it to me ?) and on accumulating.

Resources are a means of creating. The Earth is a resource which must often be wrought so as to extract other resources from which we could get the elements necessary not to affluence but to enjoy altogether a blissful life. Each shaping or creation step is underpinned by a trained and learnt human activity from an equally shaped human "resource". When organising creation and sharing activities of resources, we must turn our back to all exploitation processes. We must stop exploitation of humanity by tools become hypertrophied tools as well as the exploitation of man by man, denounced in particular by Karl Marx. Humanity must set up a nested organisation interlocking all levels from the local to the global one, according to the principle of subsidiarity : individual autonomy, local autonomy and national autonomy must be combined with the articulations and the cooperations needed to manage individual, inter-individual, local, inter-local, national, international, planetary issues, at the relevant levels.

Certain activities and their outcomes are shared as soon as obtained or are made of resources which must be shared according to jointly decided rules for the reasons stated above. For some of them, these outcomes are products that must however travel from their place of creation to their location of use. Such circulation pertains even more to the "ordinary goods and services" which form the relevant core for a market system. It shall operate effectively as a market freed from power effect from any actor deprived of the legitimacy of the representatives of the public interest. In short, we ought to restore the different laws of competition and the different standards and legislation to delineate and regulate these "markets" as it had become the case up to the Seventies in the

industrialised countries of the time. We must also be sure to avoid arbitrarily elongated circulations since they are generally motivated by a distortion ; their costs are excessive in matter of natural patrimony preservation. A convivial society favours shorter circuits in particular in the field of agriculture and food.

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