

GEOPOLITICS OF CHAOS

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GEOPOLITICS OF CHAOS

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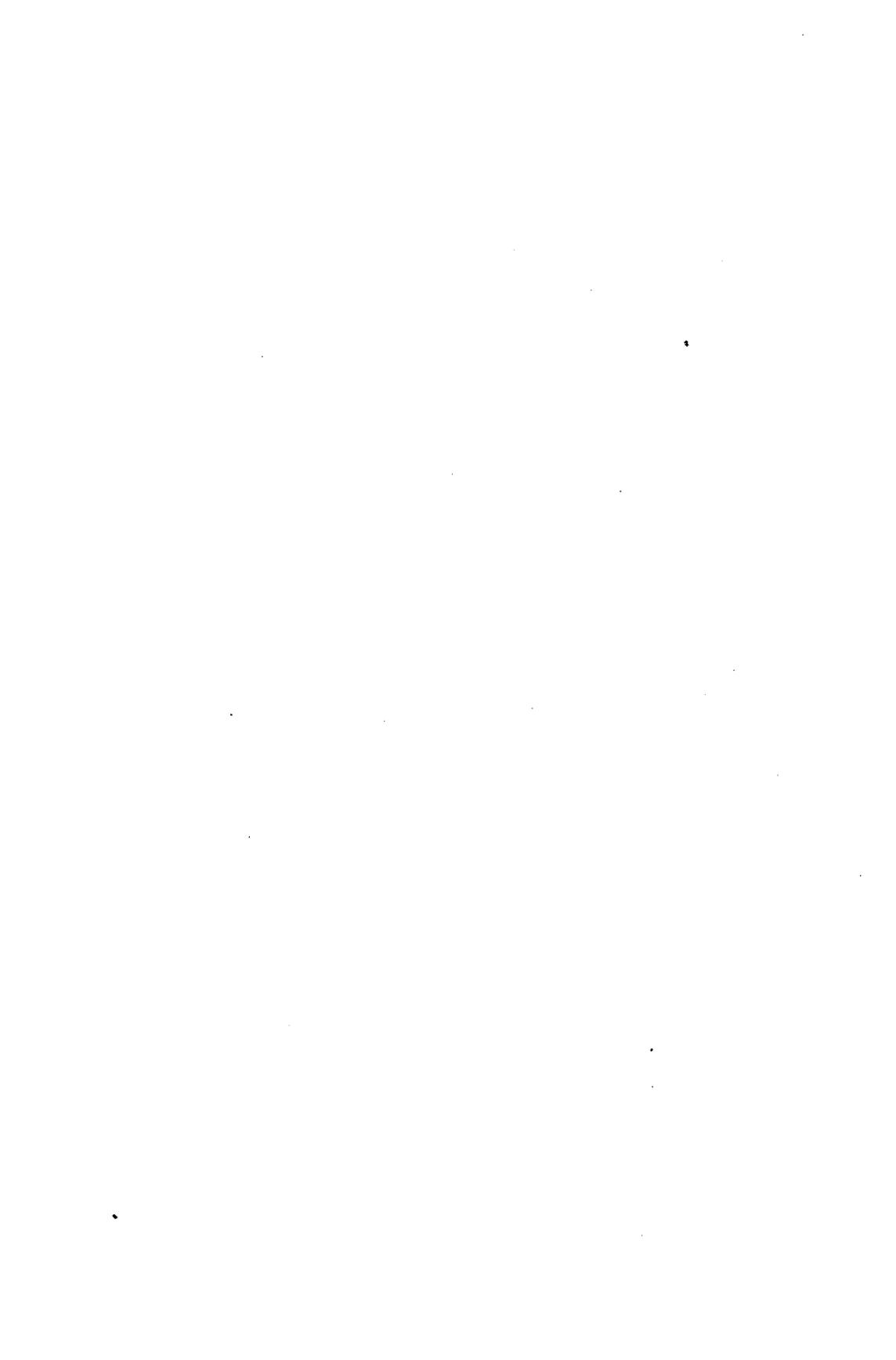


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Introduction

The Metamorphoses of Power

Who controls the world, now that we are at the end of the second millennium? Since the end of the Cold War, there is only one great power, the United States, but how real is its influence in a universe where the economic laws dictate their own supreme laws? In this new context, what is the role of international regulatory authorities like the UN, G7, OECD, the World Trade Organization (WTO), etc.? How much power is in the hands of the media, special interest groups (lobbies), nongovernmental organizations (NGO's)? Everywhere, in international relations as well as within society, a power shift is taking place. It is perceptible at the level of the State, whose capacity for intervention is reduced, as well as at the family, school and company levels. We are shifting from authoritative, hierarchical, vertical forms of power to negotiated, intricate, horizontal forms, which are more civilized but more complex.

Conflicts and Threats of a New Type

From a geopolitical point of view, the world appears to be in the midst of great chaos: on one side, the multiplication of regional economic unions (the European Union, NAFTA, Mercosur, APEC...); on the other, the renaissance of nationalism, the rise of fundamentalism, states divided, minorities claiming their independence. The majority of the conflicts at the century's end (Algeria, Albania, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Chiapas, Sudan, Liberia, Congo-Zaire, Rwanda, etc.) are internal conflicts, intra-state, with a central power opposing a fraction of its own population. In addition, international organized crime and mafia networks constitute new threats because they control many clandestine networks (prostitution, smuggling, drug trafficking, weapons sales, nuclear proliferation). In addition, the great migrations due to poverty are also viewed by the rich states of the North as trans-border threats. And in these instances (as with air pollution or the propagation of new diseases), the traditional weapons of the military panoply are of no use at all.

Rising Inequalities and Discrimination

The inequalities between North and South are expanding and deepening even within the most developed countries, although they constitute 20 percent the planet's population, the North controls more than 80% of world income, yet the European Union alone counts more than 50 million poor people. . . The number of unemployed alone exceeded, in 1997, 20 million. The economic machine is manufacturing more and more marginal groups, especially among young people, women and immigrants. Foreigners are stigmatized, and the extreme

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right leadership insidiously fuels xenophobic feelings in a population confronted with misery and unemployment. These problems threaten to end the era of liberal societies.

The Globalization of the Economy

At the end of this century, every nation is being swept up in the great tide of globalization which makes economies dependent on each other. The financial markets are spinning an invisible web that connects countries and, at the same time, binds and imprisons governments. It is no longer possible, practically speaking, for any nation to exist in isolation from the rest of the planet. What are the consequences for their citizens? For democracy?

New Masters of the Universe

Henceforth, the Earth is on the brink of a new era of conquest, as it was in the 15th century. At the time of the European Renaissance, a few nations were the principal actors of the conquering expansion. Today, the principal actors are the corporations and conglomerates, private industrial and financial groups intent on dominating the world, launching their raids, and piling up immense spoils. Never were the Masters of the Universe so few, nor so powerful.

Pillaging the Planet

In the name of progress and development man has undertaken, since the Industrial Revolution, the systematic destruction of the natural environment. Predations and convulsions of all kinds follow

one after the other, inflicted on the soil, the water, the vegetation and Earth's atmosphere. Pollution produces heat, affects the climate, thins the ozone layer, and causes acid rains, all of which endanger our planet's future. One can say that the excessive productivity level is the primary cause of the current pillaging, but the demographic explosion of the South, and urban pollution, are also factors.

Citizens are concerned by the extent of the ecological disasters and the problems they raise. The disappearance of many species of flora and fauna creates troublesome imbalances. Protecting the variety of life has become an imperative; for the wealth of nature is, first and foremost, its diversity.

Cities Attacking the Earth

All across the planet, irresistibly, the population is being concentrated in cities, whose disproportionate growth increasingly eludes human control. In the North as in the South, tentacular commercial agglomerations are upsetting ecological, social and economic balances, draining most of the wealth, and adding to tensions between the privileged few and the excluded masses. Governing powers, often not very democratic themselves, are unable to regulate peacefully such powerful corporations.

The megacities of the South (Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Calcutta, Cairo, Lagos, and Shanghai) seem to herald the decomposition of the Western model of urban society. Meanwhile, in the city fringes of the North, crisis envelops the ghetto populations—populations with no future prospects, and who express their despair in frequent bursts of violence.

Science and Technology, Triumphs and Dangers

More than a thousand satellites are in permanent circuit around the Earth. These machines have become essential for television, telecommunications, meteorology, military surveillance, navigation, etc.

The economic and political stakes of space technologies have taken on paramount importance for national interests. These days, power attained in space requires a mighty industry in aeronautics as well as rockets, launchers, and satellite manufacture. Only a few nations (the United States, the European Union, Russia, China, Japan, India, Israel) have the assets to dominate these technologies, which open to them the path to power in the next century.

Does this irreversible development of technology put humanity's own survival in question? While man continues to hold nature as a maidservant, voices are raised that his research might have reached essential limits. Knowledge, instead of being put to the use of spreading well-being and justice, too often serves the ultimate goals of those in power.

Increasingly a mere handful of companies dominate the world's research for their own profit. In the North, the catastrophes of Chernobyl, transfusions of contaminated blood, use of carcinogenic asbestos and the pread of "mad cow" disease were not enough to spur the vast debate required by the emergence of the "techno-society." The South, victim of brain drain, increasingly refuses to accommodate industrial waste and pesticides. Not satisfied with extending commercial logic to the whole of social activities, contemporary man is now integrating life itself into commerce. The cell, the gene, thanks to breakthroughs in genetic engineering and biotechnologies, has become

a raw material like oil or cotton. Can human beings agree to become, on behalf of science and progress, a raw material for profit?

Revolution in Communications

The marriage of data processing, telecommunications and television caused a true revolution in communications made possible by computer technologies. That means more ways of communicating (as shown by the current boom in mobile telephones and the Internet) and the development of new practices. An entire panoply of multi-media mechanisms and devices is emerging. This communication revolution entails all kinds of consequences, in the economic field—communication industries could be the engines of the economy at the turn of the next millennium, as well as in the sociological field—new rifts between the info-rich and the info-poor, between the hyper-equipped countries of the North and the under-equipped countries of the South.

Toward a Civilization of Chaos?

Western societies are no longer reflected clearly in the mirror of the future; they seem haunted by unemployment, overcome by uncertainty, intimidated by the shock of new technologies, disturbed by the globalization of the economy, worried by environmental pollution and strongly demoralized by galloping corruption. In addition, the proliferation of “ethnic wars” spreads the residue of remorse in these societies and a feeling of nausea.

In this dark context, who is responsible for the upkeep of humanistic culture as a signpost of our civilization? The United States

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remains the reference point and the pioneer of mass culture—that is, sports, world music, television series, news broadcasts, and amusement parks. Taken in hand by the merchants, the cultural model has devolved into something insignificant, sensational and vulgar.

Can creative professionals allow this to go on? Will intellectuals be able to mobilize themselves to prevent civilization, at the dawn of a new millennium, from sinking into the delirium of chaos?

Chapter I
Mutation of the Future

Two things threaten the world: order and disorder.
PAUL VALÉRY

Everyone is aware that we live, at the end of this century, in a period of ruptures and breaks—a general recombining of geostrategic forces, social forms, economic factors and cultural touchstones. Everywhere, alarm and distress are replacing the great hopes for a “new world order” that, we now know, was still-born. And our society, as earlier societies in times of transition, wonders whether it is not on the road to chaos.

On the eve of the Third Millennium, everyone can tell you that uncertainty has become the only certainty; a kind of global pessimism is spreading in a climate of general dissatisfaction and disenchantment.

Eight years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and seven years after the Gulf War and the implosion of the Soviet Union, optimism is finished. Citizens survey the horizon of the future and they panic,

seeing the forces of disorganization and anomie gathering everywhere. The threshold of the planetary age where we find ourselves seems to be full of unknown factors, dangers and threats.

For decades, the West obstinately sought the collapse of the communist regimes in the East and the destruction of the Soviet Union. With these objectives achieved, the atmosphere should be euphoria and triumph. It is not. Even this unhopd-for victory is cause for concern: "We have before us a world even more mysterious than ever before," admits, for example, Robert Graves, a former director of the CIA.

How did we get here? In the most varied fields, the upheavals of these last years have placed societies at a fundamental fork in the road and each one claims to be right. A great disorder scrambles the geopolitical landscape after the Cold War while we want to understand: What is going on? Why are we here? What great design is our civilization following?

People have noticed the political leadership's inability to analyze and explain the scope and the nature of today's crisis. No one seems able to identify the founding principle of the new era that we entered after the collapse of the post-Communist world. We must find new forms of thought.

Events of very great magnitude—German unification; the disappearance of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe; the collapse of the USSR (of which the causes remain enigmatic); the crisis of the United Nations; the abolition of apartheid in South Africa; the end of "low intensity wars" (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola, Afghanistan, Kampuchea); radical changes in Ethiopia, Guinea, Algeria, Chile; the end of the Mobutu regime in Congo-Zaire; mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestinians; the renaissance of China and

Hong Kong's return to Beijing's control; India's emergence, etc.—completely alter the geostrategic face of the planet. Other events, slower in pace but enormous in impact, such as the continuing construction of Europe, also exert a decisive influence on the general flow of the world's political life and cause a cascade of multiple disturbances.

All these changes are added to large scale mutations which, in the course of the last decade, have upset the modes of organization of work and the methods of production with the massive introduction of computerization and new communication technologies in factories and enterprises.

The end of the Cold War and the changes under way, by releasing thought from ideological yokes and imposed loyalties, encourage us to get a better understanding of the real world, outside of dogmas, doctrines and intellectual ivory tower conceptions.

This exceptional period corresponds to a true change of era; and that change is causing a new anguish in the West, a deep malaise in the developed societies. The more it is so as no one knows what the new age, just beginning, will look like. "We are in the middle of a long and painful process," notes Alexander King, cofounder of the Club of Rome, "leading to the emergence, in one form or another, of a global society whose probable structure it is not yet possible to imagine."

The Age of Heroes is over. We now know that everything is interdependent and that, at the same time, everything is in conflict; that the new order must include everything and exclude nothing from its reach: politics, economics, the social, the cultural, the ecological, a scope that is apparently excessively vast for the hegemonic ambitions of the United States, even after its crushing military victory in the Gulf

War. “The United States’ situation is curious,” observes Arthur Schlesinger, former adviser to President Kennedy, “it is a military super power, but unable to assume the cost of its own wars. Thus it cannot have a great future as a super power. We cannot control the world.”

In fact, the plan to unite the world under Washington’s guidance is strongly countered by the resurgence of national, religious, and ethnic special interests. . . all these historical forces, frozen for so long by the balance of terror and now breaking loose in a torrent at the end of the millennium.

The United Nations, like the rest of the international organizations put in place at the conclusion of the Second World War, seems not to be well-suited to counter the violence of the new upheavals. Again, hope for a world that is more just, harmoniously governed by the UN, has broken down—especially after the resounding failures of the UN in Somalia, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Rwanda.

Within the United Nations, Germany and Japan, after years of keeping a low profile, no longer make a mystery of their ambition. They want seats as permanent members of the Security Council, like the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China. That status, they believe, would finally add a political dimension that is missing from their economic superpower status that everyone accords them.

The idea of reforming the UN has been in the air for a long time. It gained new strength with the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the USSR and of the whole socialist block that for decades constituted one of the principal protagonists of the life of the United Nations. The most remarkable consequence is the abandonment of “the veto policy” practiced by the Big Five, which paralyzed

the Organization for a long time.

“Since the creation of the UN in 1945,” notes Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary-General, “a hundred major conflicts have erupted all over the world, causing more than 20-million deaths. The UN remained powerless before the majority of these crimes because of the vetoes—279 of them—countering the vote of the Security Council. The Cold War being over, the veto ended on May 31, 1990.” This has allowed the United States to brutally seize power within the Security Council and to do things its own way, under cover of “recommendations of the UN,” from the Gulf War against Iraq to the nomination, at the end of 1996, of the new Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In connection with the changes within the Security Council, isn't it time for great demographic powers which are, at the same time, regional powers, such as India, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, and Egypt, to have a place as permanent members within a Security Council more accurately reflecting the true face of the world? As the great Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate in literature, has said: “Why not start by democratizing the Security Council? Why not extend its power and give a little true voice to those whose destiny is at stake in this new order which is being built?”

In this new geopolitical context, basic concepts seem to be seriously out of synch: concepts of the adversary, of the threat, of the danger. The significance of these concepts has deteriorated, and no one knows anymore what they mean, exactly. Who is the enemy? What is the predominant danger? What is its thrust? These questions, to which the West has, for seventy years, always answered “Communism,” “the USSR,” remain henceforth without a clear answer. However, these questions remain fundamental and dictate the

structure of any political regime, and in particular of the democratic regimes. They condition the definition of a security system capable of preserving itself and preventing crises. They enable, especially, to build a discourse on its own identity.

“Who is the enemy of the West?”—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) itself can no longer answer this question. And that deeply affects this alliance, which is questioning its own identity and objectives, and currently seems to have lost its way.

The principal enemy is no longer univocal; it is, from now on, a monster with a thousand faces that in turn may assume the appearance of the demographic bomb, drugs, the Mafias, nuclear proliferation, ethnic fanaticism, AIDS, the Ebola virus, organized crime, Islamic fundamentalists, the greenhouse effect, desertification, population migrations, radioactive clouds, etc. All these are threats without borders and planetary in scale; they are propagated all across the Earth and cannot be fought with the traditional weapons of war.

How, under these conditions, can a nation set out a new foreign policy, when the major problems are global, transnational (nuclear risks, the environment, hunger, illiteracy, new epidemics, fundamentalism, etc.) and cannot be solved on a local scale?

Some see nebulous Islam as the dominant threat, like a new *Internationale*, radiating out from its principal poles—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Pakistan, seeking to destabilize countries like Egypt and Algeria, and likely to take most of the Arab world down with them.

But that would mean forgetting that Islam’s reemergence has, above all, local causes and takes its root in the social and economic failure of non-democratic, often corrupt, States. And Islam also takes root in the desire for revenge by the disinherited, the outcasts and those excluded from modernization gone wrong. Under cover of religious

extremism, in an Arab world frozen in place by autocratic regimes, we are witnessing the irruption of the people onto the political scene.

In the whole of the Third World, however, the time of rebellions seems to be finished. Wars linger on, here and there, in Africa in particular, but they are no longer waged on behalf of Messianic political ideas of liberating mankind and building society from a universal plan. Generally, these wars are confrontations of regional character, tribal or ethnic, as in Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, etc.

In Latin America, the last guerrillas still in the *maquis* (Colombia, Peru) are tempted by negotiation and integration into political life: for example, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador, after ten years of war, and more recently, at the end of 1996, the Guatemala guerrillas. Even the historical chief of the Shining Path, Abimael Guzman, from his prison cell in Lima, called for negotiations.

In this context, the irruption in January 1994 in Chiapas (Mexico) of the Zapatist National Liberation Army under commander Marcos reminds us that too many inequalities and injustices remain in Latin America and that there will always be reasons to revolt: the Indians, in particular, are the victims.

Western Europe finds itself geographically caught in pincers, in the jaws of two vast unstable and dangerous zones: the East is devastated by economic disaster, blazing with nationalism and wars underway or yet to come; and the southern coast of the Mediterranean is giving way under the weight of demographic excess and is sick from its authoritative regimes, corroded by endemic disorders and constantly threatened with social explosion.

Yet the malaise of Europe does not originate in the misfortunes

that strike its neighboring countries; its malaise, at the very heart of the old continent, is derived from societies that are questioning themselves, after the laborious approval of the Treaty of Maastricht. People wonder whether there is really an advantage in belonging to the European Union, and whether the progressive loss of national independence is an excessive price to pay.

At the same time Western Europe, together with North America and Japan, constitutes a triad of power where the greatest financial ease, the principal industrial conglomerates, and the essential technological innovations are all concentrated at once. This triad dominates the world like no other empire in history.

But this domination is undermined by the effects of another phenomenon of planetary magnitude: the globalization of the economy, a globalization which never reached so high a degree before, and which the recent World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements will stimulate still further, by intensifying the free trade. That favors the economic emergence of Asia-Pacific (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam): Added to the dynamism of Japan, and with the rise of China, this emergence foreshadows the hour when the West—for the first time since the 16th century—will no longer rule the world.

The more so as a new type of crisis is weakening the great industrial powers of earlier times (the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France) in particular because of the consequences of the expanding new information technologies. The world economy is completely thrown into disarray, as it was, during the latter half of the 19th century, by the second industrial revolution (the invention of the railroad, telegraph, steamboat, threshing-machine, sewing machine, etc.) when productivity made a gigantic leap, causing the great crisis

of 1893.

Currently, a billion and half workers in Asia-Pacific Rim earn between 2.5 and 44 dollars per day, when the average daily wages in the industrialized countries of Western Europe, the United States and Japan are never lower than 95 dollars (130 dollars in France and the United States, 198 in Germany). Manufactured goods and agricultural produce cost much less in the countries of the South in competition with those manufactured or cultivated in the North. That leads to re-locating factories to the South and massive unemployment in the North, as well as attempts at dismantling social protection policies that have been shown to increase the cost of labor. . .

No longer under the weight of the two superpowers, the world is in search of new stability and feels the full effect of the two powerful and contradictory forces, of fusion and fission.

On the one hand, certain nations seek to ally themselves, to amalgamate with others for the purpose of forming greater, especially economic, wholes, larger, more solid, less vulnerable—following the example of the European Union, a political animal of a radically new type. Other groups of countries come together as free trade agreements multiply, in North and South America (NAFTA, Mercosur), in North Africa (UMA), in Asia (ASEAN), Eastern Europe, etc., reducing trade barriers in order to stimulate commerce as they strengthen their political and security alliances.

Contrary to, and simultaneous with, these trends toward fusion, other multinational groups (Canada, India, Sri Lanka, China, Congo) are experiencing the effects of fission. They dismember themselves (Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Somalia) or implode and split up (the Soviet Union, the Balkans, the Caucasus) under the dismayed eyes of their neighbors.

The three federal states of Eastern Europe—the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia—broke apart, giving birth to some twenty-two independent States! A true sixth continent. That is more new sovereign countries than appeared after the First World War, during the break-up of three empires, Austrian, Tsarist and Ottoman; more than after the African de-colonization in the Fifties and Sixties.

Almost everywhere in Europe, these fractures have re-opened very old wounds; in many areas, the borders are disputed and the presence of minorities gives to rise to irredentism, to the loudest nationalists, to dreams of annexation, secession or ethnic purification... In the Balkans and the Caucasus, that movement has led very quickly to open wars (in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Moldova, in Nagorno-Karabakh, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Conflicts of the same type threaten elsewhere: in the Crimea, in Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Transylvania, Slovakia, Estonia, not to mention those which could explode right inside immense Russia, whose war in Chechnya offered an appalling foretaste.

In these fusions and fissions, some see the major confrontation of the end of this century: federalism vs. barbarism.

According to Edgar Morin, for example: “The key problem of the years to come is that of the multifaceted struggle between, on the one hand, the forces of association, federation, and confederation, not only in Europe but in the world, and the forces of disjunction, bursting, rupture, conflict.”

These “forces of disjunction” seem particularly stimulated by the renaissance of the ethnic view of the nation-state. The idea—romantic, antirepublican—that the State must exert its authority over a homogeneous ethnic community (the same language, same blood, same religion, same territory) entirely enclosed within its historical

borders, divides citizens and sunders societies. Such a nationalist design poses once again the problem of minorities and their rights. At the same time it stimulates irredentist claims like, for example, those of Serbia. After the war against Croatia, Serbia undertook to absorb, under the very nose of the UN peacekeeping forces, the areas populated by Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. By the same token, in the Caucasus, Armenia continues to claim the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh and, on the Black Sea, Russia seeks restitution of the Crimean Peninsula . . .

Such a concept of nationalism, which tore apart Europe in the 19th century and up until the end of the First World War, is re-appearing in Western Europe, to the benefit, curiously, of European construction. The centripetal force of this latter scrambles and disrupts the contours of the nation-state which, more and more ill at ease, seems to be giving way to a double erosion between the European super-state (to which continues transferring its jurisdiction), and the various State-regions (to which, in the name of decentralization, it entrusts an increasingly significant part of its prerogatives).

Many of these State-regions of Western Europe affirm their political personality all the more strongly, the more distinct are their cultural characteristics. Consider, for example, Northern Ireland, Flanders, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Scotland, Brittany, Corsica, Alsace, and "Padania". . . In some of these areas, the separatist movements spout an extreme leftist ideology (Basque Country, Corsica, Northern Ireland), in others, an ideology of the extreme right (Flanders, "Padania"), but in both cases, they all defend an "identity" that is somewhat mythical, and exalt the legendary "fundamental values of the original ethnic community."

Under these conditions, what becomes of national

sovereignty? It seems to be gradually eroded from all sides. Initially—and in fundamental areas like currency, defense and foreign policy—the erosion was caused by obligations imposed by economic and financial agreements (membership in the OECD, the International Monetary Fund, the European Monetary System, or the World Trade Organization, etc.), military alliances (NATO, WEU, CSCE. . .) and international treaties, but also by more insidious factors, arising from strictly technical considerations. “In a world where everything rests on technology,” notes Alexander King, “it has been necessary to conclude many agreements in fine points to allow the international system to function, whether it is a question of allocating radio frequencies and air traffic routes, safety regulations, the standardization of industrial components, etc. In each case, those fine points involves an imperceptible limitation on the freedom of national action, the cumulative effect of which is far from negligible.”

This dissolution of the identity of the state intensifies the confusion, especially in Western Europe, as was recently shown by the various legislative and presidential elections. Everywhere, the political community seems to be discredited and out of step with public opinion: the dominant parties hardly inspire confidence and they are losing voters. In the United States as well, a few months before the presidential election of November 1996, 75% of the citizens were “not satisfied” with the candidates William Clinton, Robert Dole and Ross Perot.

Even in Japan, one finds an identical phenomenon. The preparation for elections goes on now in an atmosphere of political depreciation; neither the government nor the opposition is respected. Pessimism is widespread.

Parties and politicians are largely regarded as responsible for

the global crisis of a society that offers neither safety nor solidarity, and where frustrations are multiplying. Citizens seem to be tired of bad management, corruption, malfunction of the public services, taxation that they do not see translated into improvements in their everyday life, absence of reforms, excess of bureaucracy and lack of help from the state. "Faced with this society that has become foreign to itself, we have two types of rebellions in every country," observes the economist André Gorz. "On the one hand, those people who are culturally prepared to assume their autonomy are demanding the creation of (and protection from the power of the state and the power of money) new areas of self-managed solidarity, and self-determined activities. On the other hand, we have the retrogressive reaction of those who would like to find the safety of pre-modern order, stable, hierarchically arranged, strongly integrated, where as a birthright each one has a place assured and assigned according to his membership, his nation or his race."

These rebellions of a new type come on the heels of the labor movement inspired by a specific vision of the future that seems to have become blurred with the collapse of the communist regimes and the crisis of social democracy. Society no longer represents itself in terms of social classes, in any case, while it wonders how to politically translate social conflicts that are no longer class conflicts.

Certain essayists had gone as far, at the beginning of the decade, perhaps somewhat precipitously, as speaking of "the end of social classes." "The end of a policy of classes, and perhaps of the classes themselves," wrote, for example, the sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, "means that there is no natural electorate for one particular reform program. The OECD countries are dominated by a majority class which represents 60%, 70% or 80% of the voters, who are persuaded, on the whole, that their aspirations could be fulfilled if

things continue more or less as they are. They are not calling for any major reform; all they want, on the contrary, is security, a little luck, a government that fills their pockets, and bank accounts that continue paying.”

But, if there is no “natural electoral constituency for a particular program of reforms,” what becomes of the left, what becomes of socialism? Does it still have a future? Lionel Jospin, leader of the French Socialist Party and candidate in the French presidential election of May 1995, is clear: “There are few reasons to believe that socialism, as a specific mode of production, has a future.”¹

Liberalism does not seem to be gaining the massive sympathy of the citizens in any case. Implemented with a relentless rigor during the decade of the Eighties in the United States by Ronald Reagan and in the United Kingdom by Margaret Thatcher, these economic policy doctrines involved brutal social consequences: the aggravation of inequalities, increased unemployment, de-industrialization, degradation of public services, dilapidation of the utilities. . . All of these problems, according to the prophets of monetarism, would be solved by “the invisible hand of the market,” and by macroeconomic growth. The best experts believed that, thanks to deregulation, with the abolition of exchange control, with financial globalization, and with the globalization of trade, expansion would be endless.

Easy riches were encouraged in the Eighties, even in countries controlled by Socialists, such as Spain and France. Adventurers, become *nouveaux riches*, some having achieved the rank of captains of industry, were held up by those in power and the media as models to follow, emblems of the collective reconciliation with private capital and companies. Financial speculation was encouraged. We were witnessing the apotheosis of the golden boys.

With the crash of October 1987 and the collapse of “the financial bubble,” bankruptcies followed one after another, and then we learned of the incredible swindles specific to the casino-economy. In Japan, for example, on the list of ten greatest fortunes published by the monthly magazine *Nikkei Venture*, only three billionaires owed their wealth to activities belonging to the real economy. The seven others were speculators.

Many individuals who had been cited as models because of their striking success during the second half of the Eighties, have been accused of fraud, extortion, corruption and breach of trust of various orders. They frequently found themselves in prison. The heroes were cheaters. The list is endless, from Robert Maxwell to Bernard Tapie.

Their conception of the casino-economy, among other things, was directly responsible for the American savings banks’ debacle (40 billion dollars in losses), which brought to ruin thousands of investors, and the failure of the *Crédit Lyonnais* in France (more than 100 billion francs in losses). That proves, once again, the fallaciousness of the supposition ironically recalled by John K. Galbraith, which would have us believe that “big money would necessarily be in the hands of gifted people with an exceptional intellectual power.”

Thus capitalism, having emerged victorious from its confrontation with Soviet socialism, appears itself to be singularly discredited by its own excesses. So much so that, here and there, nostalgia for the Welfare State penetrates increasingly strongly from now on despite its ongoing dismantling in the name of free markets. People denounce the dual society: a group of hyper-endowed, on one side, and countless crowds of the precarious, the unemployed and the excluded, on the other.

Despite all this social devastation, the neo-liberal model is

growing, imposed on the South by the big financial organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the IMF). The macro-economic inflation indicators, monetary policy, budget deficits, foreign trade, and growth are set up as absolute requirements to which everything must be sacrificed. There is no other acceptable stance, one would think. “Democracy together with the market,” affirms, for example, Jean-François Revel, “provides the only way out from Communism as well as from under-development,”—which is confirmed by one of the great “gurus” of ultra-liberalism, the American economist Jeffrey Sachs: “I am deeply convinced that the key to resolving many problems, including those of development, resides in integration into the world economy.”

The market dictates what is truth, beauty, good, and just. “The laws of the market” have become the new Commandments. To deviate from these laws is to head fatally toward ruin and destruction.

Especially after the failure of the planned economy in the USSR, the idea is spreading that there is, in the whole world, one and only one way (neo-liberal) to run the economic affairs of a country; and that all the economies from now on are connected, interdependent. This system sets up a new totalitarianism, with its dogmas and its great priests. On behalf of “the total market,” new laws are to cover the whole planet, with few exceptions.

They are applied, in particular, in certain Eastern European countries such as Poland and Russia, with the relentless rigor of neophytes, no matter what the social costs. And this, in spite of the warnings pronounced since 1991 by people like Mikhail Gorbachev: “80% of the Russian population live below the poverty line, and to forget the most underprivileged sectors while thinking only of macro-economic stabilization, is intolerable.” Very quickly, the policies

imposed by shock therapy would bring disappointment.

While remaining massively in favor of the market economy, more people are refusing reform by ruination, and call for an interventionist state policy to correct excesses, to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty, and to ensure a correct level of social protection for all. It was this program that was taken up by the former Polish communist leadership, become social democrat and constitutive party of the Union of the Democratic Left (SLD). It had already enabled them to win the legislative elections in September 1993, and ensured the victory of Aleksander Kwasniewski in the presidential election of 1995.

Poland is not the only Eastern European country where the population is turning away from the political forces that opened the way for reforms. In Lithuania, Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Bulgaria the former Communists were electoral successes, as well as in Russia, at the legislature level, on December 17, 1995.

To impose ultraliberal strategy by force, in spite of popular resistance, not only means weakening democracy but feeding the most aggressive nationalism. “The awakening of nationalism in the East is generally just a reaction of desperate people,” judges Karol Modzelewski, “workmen, technicians, teachers reduced to poverty and downgraded, all seeking simple explanations to an incomprehensible phenomenon—that of their misfortune. And they easily find culprits: elites, foreigners, people of different languages or religions, on whom to vent their frustrations.”

In this respect, and even if the conflicts seem to be dissipating in the Balkans and the Caucasus, Eastern Europe remains one of the most unstable areas in the world, as long as the ultraliberal shock is not exhausted. Such instability was shown by the great popular demon-

striations of winter 1996-1997 in Serbia and Bulgaria, and the armed revolts in southern Albania, in March 1997, by people who were ruined by financial speculation.

At one time, the economists in the East proclaimed, "Everything that does not obey the plan is condemned." The same people, converted to liberalism, say today with equal conviction: "Everything that does not obey the laws of the market must be banned." Based on competition and competitiveness, these laws require a spirit of combat, a permanent rivalry, and a push to produce at lower cost and to very quickly make products obsolete. Technological acceleration has strongly stimulated productivity in these last years, and now one can produce more, in less time and with fewer employees. In France, according to André Gorz, the annual work time has decreased by a third in thirty years, while production has more than doubled. And the phenomenon is accelerating, so much so that one can today produce more wealth without creating jobs. Unemployment is likely to become structural and endemic unless there is agreement—as the Greens are suggesting, in Europe—to share jobs and to consider a twenty-four hour work week (instead of forty) without wage cutting.

In the interest of improving their balance sheets, companies will undoubtedly continue to "downsize." In the United States, for example, General Motors closed 21 factories, laid off 20,000 workers and 10,000 executives; IBM eliminated 20,000 jobs; Digital Equipment, 10,000, etc. With the end of the Cold War, the American armaments industry single-handedly killed no fewer than 500,000 jobs (aeronautics alone lost more than 100,000 since 1990).

Service firms are no longer spared either. After the great restructuring that struck traditional agriculture and industry, it is the tertiary sector's turn to experience a drastic reduction in the number of

employees. Banks, insurance, media, travel, publicity. . . all these sectors—already relocating some of their activities because of progress in computer technologies and telecommunications—will continue to lose, on behalf of the “global market,” additional hundreds of thousands of jobs . . .

In the South, these same laws cause profound tensions; for, theoretically, the countries are growing rich (if one believes the macroeconomic indicators) whereas the citizens are growing poor. In Peru, President Fujimori himself took over by force, in 1990, in order to be able to implement, authoritatively, his ultraliberal plan. In Algeria, in January 1992, the military power acted in the same manner while the population, impelled by despair, joined an Islamist party *en masse* . . . To save the market, the West agrees to sacrifice democracy.

The countries of the South participate in and adopt this “Westernizing of the world” attitude which leads the historian David S. Landes to say: “All the underdeveloped countries of the globe are converted to the religions of industry and wealth, and their faith exceeds those of the missionary leaders. Never, during the thousands of years that civilizations have been in contact with each other, did any of them know such a universal success.”

Fascination with the North—while the zones of hardship multiply in the South (in Colombia, Algeria, Sudan, Congo-Zaire, Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, Angola. . .) and cataclysms (droughts, desertification, AIDS) attack many of these countries—has impelled multitudes to emigrate, often clandestinely, toward what appear, despite everything, to be the poles of prosperity of the planet—in particular toward the United States and Western Europe.

In Europe, the crisis atmosphere (20 million unemployed) focuses all rancor on these clandestine arrivals—parties, from the left

to the extreme right, denounce these “intruders” and demand that they be sent back. Lumped into the same basket together with these clandestine arrivals are the long-established communities of immigrants.

The neofascist talk of the extreme right targets them explicitly (camouflaging, under populist cover, other racisms and a strong anti-semitic feeling) and thus builds a new legitimacy. In France, for example, the *Front National*'s proposals against immigration are now approved by more than half of the French, whereas hardly 15% of them voted for this party in the legislative elections of May 1997.

For the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, such an attitude among the citizens is not unrelated to economic dogmatism. “The consequences of a policy intended to manage economic equilibrium (in the narrow definition of the term) are paid for in thousands of ways, in the form of social and psychological costs, in the form of unemployment, diseases, and delinquency, of alcohol, drug abuse, and suffering that leads to resentment and to racism, and political demoralization . . .”

People feel that their problems are too severe and the powers that be are too far away; they do not feel that they are recognized, nor understood, by those who have the means to act or to protest. They see that the majority of the companies continue to be structured by legal frameworks and policies developed at the dawn of the industrial era, at the end of the 18th and during the 19th centuries. These structures seem incapable today of accommodating the complexity of societies weakened by multiple factors that are changing the economy, accelerating information exchange, transforming culture, upsetting work structures and sources of security, unraveling the way of life. . . In certain fields the acceleration is such that confusion and skepticism have taken over. The general political environment seems, by compar-

ison, to be immobilized, petrified, obsolete . . .

People aspire, confusedly, to a new, more active role, more immediate, more directly related to the conditions they live in. But, at the same time, they vote less, defy parties and power, desert the trade unions, scoff at justice, criticize the media . . .

The citizens' driving desire for democracy is expressed the whole world over. It initially cracked apart the tightest, most rigid regimes: Latin-American dictatorships, communist governments in the East, African autocracies, etc. Western democracies are not spared; their leaders are suddenly discovering a serious disjuncture between the existing institutions and the concrete concerns of the citizens.

The principal ambition of democracy is to fight against poverty, injustice and iniquity, to tirelessly denounce the club of charlatans. Having failed in these battles, democracy is then disputed by the citizens, on behalf of a political feeling deeply rooted in the republican plan: the aspiration to equality of rights and duties.

People vaguely sense that there are new humans rights to tackle, that the generation of political rights (since as far back as the 18th century), then social rights (of the 19th and 20th centuries), must be succeeded by a generation of new rights guaranteeing citizens the right to information, peace, and safety, but also to purity of air and water, and environmental protection.

This topic of the environment, formerly seen as a separate question, is understood more and more to cut across all fields. Environmental protection is an imperative common to all societies. The conviction that the planet is in danger seems to be one of the most important political givens at this end of the century. Rather than thinking of the world according to economic parameters, as neo-liberal dogmatism would have it, wouldn't it be better to rebuild it on the

basis of ecological information? “The idea that monetary value is the measure of growth and development seems questionable,” affirms Alexander King. “Energy is the engine of the economy, and it is the only absolute; money is just a substitute.”

However, energy consumption is extremely unequal. According to a report from the World Resources Institute, the seven most developed countries of the OECD consumed, in 1995, 43% of the world production of combustible fuels and most of the forest derivatives. Such a statistic makes it literally absurd to think of bringing the whole planet up to the rich countries’ levels of consumption. All the resources of the planet would be insufficient. That is why, since the Conference of Rio, more and more political leaders are getting the idea that the old East-West confrontation is nothing compared to the North-South confrontation about the environment that might be precipitated and quickened if nothing is done.

For the first time, the debate on climatic change has become high policy; and Western man must admit that technical and industrial progress does not inevitably result in a surplus of happiness. A Faustian threshold seems to have been reached. Beyond this threshold, the phantoms will come to meet us. “We should give up the idea that techno-industrial growth brings only benefits,” affirms Edgar Morin. “Our societies believed they were progressing along a historical highway toward a happy future. Today, it’s time to change routes; we must consider the concept of development in a richer, more complicated context. In any event, we have lost the guaranteed future, not only where Communism reigned, but everywhere.”

Naturally, the wasteful society must be followed by a society that shares. After years of financial euphoria, of laxness and of hoaxes, citizens feel a strong desire to return to virtuous activities:

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ethics, work well done, feeling the value of one's time, competence, excellence, honesty . . . Confusedly, everyone senses that such a return to old values is the only possible way to preserve the planet, to protect nature, and to save mankind. Can we rebuild the world any other way?

Notes

1. *Le Monde*, April 11, 1992.

Chapter 2

American Neohegemony

This century has definitely been American. Since the 1900's, the United States has offered the world two great modern myths, two great universal hopes: Santa Claus for the children, and Labor Day for the workers: dream and conviction as signs and designs for a new country.

But America would also produce, from the beginning, some of the major innovations that have fascinated the planet: the car, telephone, light bulb, cinema (Edison's kinoscope, in 1891), skyscraper, highway, airplane, typewriter, refrigerator, electric razor, cigarettes, chewing-gum, etc. Then came the tidal wave of mass culture (mass-market newspapers, Hollywood, the comic strip, photography, jazz, radio serials, animated drawings, television, rock'n'roll, theme parks, rap, etc.), and of mass consumption (advertising, mega-stores, super-markets, shopping centers, marketing, mail order sales, pay per view, etc.).

After the United States' decisive military intervention in favor of the democratic powers (France and England) during the Great War of 1914-1918, they began, in Europe, to speak of "the American model." America was not yet the world's leading power (it would become that, in competition with the USSR, only after 1945); but already the American model of life beckoned and, on movie screens everywhere, its films imposed on American image. Its model of society is fascinating: America is, by definition, "the country of freedom," the "melting-pot," the high standard of living, success, open to the persecuted people of Central Europe and immigrants from the world over.

With the war concluded, in 1917, the Old Continent contemplated two "new worlds" emerging on its horizons: in the East, the promise of "a radiant future" offered to all the workers by the Soviet Union; in the West, America and its hopes based on capitalism and free enterprise. These two options, universal in character, would clash on every continent, forming the great debate of the century.

In this respect, after the 1929 economic crisis, the Thirties constituted perhaps the most critical moment with the rise of "a third way," Fascism. President Roosevelt was stimulating America with his Keynesian reforms; Stalin was moving toward "the construction of socialism" by forced march; Hitler put Germany back on its feet in a spectacular way. The three ways clashed militarily during the Spanish War (1936-1939) where Fascism won out. But the anti-fascists, for once joining forces, took revenge on a very different scale at the conclusion of the Second World War.

Then the Cold War started—that indirect fight for influence between the United States and the Soviet Union to impose their model on the whole Earth. The Soviets, in the immense area which they

controlled, went on to massive purgings and supported authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and Africa. For America too, on a lesser scale, it was the time of McCarthyism, “witch hunts,” and support for military dictatorships in Latin America and Asia.

The Fifties, in spite of the Korean War, were the apotheosis of a certain American life style; it was the time of James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, of Elvis Presley and the Platters, rock’n’roll, blue jeans and the slow fox trot; all that American culture would brand several generations of young Westerners. America sounded definitively synonymous, for better or worse, with modernity. With the assassination of President John Kennedy, of his brother Robert, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, with the explosion of the urban ghettos, and Watergate, the American dream to some extent broke down. And the awakening was brutal. Military interventions (always anti-democratic) followed the Cuban Missile Crisis: in Central America and in the Caribbean; in the Middle East (always in favor of Israel); and especially the Vietnam War and its atrocities which would last until 1975.

The fall of Saigon marked the end of an era—that of white America’s supremacy, sure of itself and dominating.

Domestic problems, which had never ceased, took on overwhelming proportions, especially after the libertarian fever of 1968, in particular on the question of the minorities, especially Blacks. Violence and drugs devastated the large cities whose demographic balance was shifting. The Whites, for the most part, headed for the outer suburbs, comfortable and secure, while the center of the metropolis was left to the Blacks and Hispanics.

In the Seventies and Eighties, if America still dominated the West with its economic and military power, in the eyes of the majority

in Europe it ceased to constitute a model society to be imitated. No one wanted to live like the Americans, stressed by work, frightened by violence, distressed about the future—the America that one perceives overall in crisis, ideologically as well as economically and even technologically and culturally. Japan and Germany appear, again, to be its principal rivals within the Western camp. As for the USSR . . .

The fall of the Berlin Wall, November 11, 1989, was to change the geostrategic situation definitively. The implosion of the Soviet Union, in October 1991, occurred after the American military victory in the Gulf War. For the first time without rival, the United States finally dominated the world.

And yet, their society felt more timid and torn apart than ever before. Like a kind of symbol, or bad omen, the editor of *Superman Comics* announced on November 18, 1992, two weeks after the election of William Clinton, that that most famous and emblematic of the American heroes, Superman, would die during a last adventure. America without Superman—was that an acknowledgement that this Superman had become oversized for a country under the shadow of the specter of decline?

At the beginning of the Nineties, the situation of this great country seemed paradoxical. People were talking about its apparent weakness, when it had just emerged victorious, by absolute knockout, from the confrontation with the Soviet Union. In addition, it imposed itself on the international scene as the single super power and was able to display, in particular at the time of the Gulf War, a crushing and impressive military supremacy.

These two victories allowed Washington to dream for a moment of a new world order corresponding at the same time to its strategic ambitions and to its historical objectives. In fact, American

diplomacy had been deployed very effectively to support the settlement of the majority of the great regional crises, in particular the low intensity wars that had marked the Eighties: Afghanistan, Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Kampuchea. Even with the most complex portfolio, that of the Middle East, Washington had succeeded in breaking the log jam and had been able, at the time of the conference of Madrid in 1991, to engage the Arabs and Israelis in peace negotiations.

For a while, everything seemed to smile upon American diplomacy. The triumphant maneuvers of James Baker, then Secretary of State, in the Baltic States, the Balkans and the Caucasus left trails of independence, accompanied by mass demonstrations of adherence to the market economy and to liberal American models.

Then the difficulties started. The United States would not (could not) reinvent a great plan, like the Marshall Plan, to provide assistance to Mikhail Gorbachev, then to an ex-Soviet Union in decomposition, where the heads of the Newly Independent States—and initially the new Russian President, Boris Yeltsin—made a loud and clear call for massive financial support. The United States thus discovered that they no longer had the economic means to support their own diplomacy. They had already noticed, at the time of the Gulf War, that they no longer had the means to match their military ambition, and they had to have their principal partners finance the conflict.

The amount of American aid to the former “people’s democracies” and to the new states born out of the fragmentation of the USSR was negligible, just like the amount of financial investment in these countries. So negligible that the exaltation of victory and the hope of a new order grew dim in the face of the rapid economic degradation of the Eastern European countries. This degradation and the general

impoverishment of these societies gave rise to multiple centers of instability, sharply stimulated by the rebirth of ethnic nationalism leading here and there (in the Balkans and the Caucasus) to long-running open wars.

In addition, the collapse of Communism, which should have abolished the nuclear threat, instead made it even more insidious. Washington feared a two-sided atomic proliferation: one coming from the dispersion of nuclear weapons and one that could be generated, in the long term, by the dispersion of Soviet atomic specialists among countries “on the threshold,” i.e. those on the point of obtaining the bomb . . .

The foreign policy balance sheet appeared to be much worse than one could have imagined in the heady days of euphoria of the extraordinary year that was 1989. Even within the United Nations, the central role of Washington, which seemed to be reconfirmed after the Gulf War, was again disputed, in particular by the aspiration of other states to occupy a seat as a permanent member of the Security Council. In particular, by the large economic rivals of the United States—Japan and Germany, as by the demographic giants of the South: India, Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria.

In addition, old riddles continued unsolved: in particular, the United States’ conflict with Libya and especially, more important because of the domestic implications, the conflict with Cuba where Fidel Castro had succeeded in avoiding the collapse of his regime in spite of Washington’s maneuvers and pressures.

So strongly agitated abroad, this period of 1988-1992 coincided, domestically, with another great collapse, that of the neoliberal dream of easy money and enrichment without effort. The country had been living beyond its means and had to pay for the financial lunacy of

the Eighties.

The era opened by Ronald Reagan and characterized by market deregulation and the emergence of the *golden boys* ended badly. The majority of the great heroes of the Stock Exchange, those whose striking rise to riches had filled the world with wonder and seemed to demonstrate the effectiveness of blazing capitalism—Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, Martin Siegel, Dennis Levine, John Gutfreund—were revealed to be impostors and often ended up in prison.

Their speculative fury, and that of their followers, wound up endangering not only the American stock exchange system (in the crash of October 1987) but the international financial system.

The economic balance-sheet of the President George Bush was extremely weak, and we would have to go back to the Presidency of Herbert Hoover, in the Thirties, to find a similarly poor result.

At the end of 1992, the federal deficit rose to 333 billion dollars, so high that the government could no longer afford to stimulate the economy. The majority of the states were in deficit; the City of New York's deficit rose to 3 billion dollars and even California, at one time so prosperous, was in crisis.

Every American household was paying approximately 2,000 dollars in taxes each year just to remunerate the holders of Treasury bills. "It took two hundred years for the national debt to reach 1,000 billion dollars, and only twelve years to get it to 4,000 billion," Felix Rohatyn noted at the time; he became an economic advisor to William Clinton.

All that resulted in a general dilapidation of the public infrastructure. In rigorous implementation of the neoliberal theses, whole sectors of health services and education, for example, were dismantled. The numbers of the poor rose, in 1991, to 35.7 million, the

highest rate since 1964; the Blacks and the Hispanics had poverty rates far higher than that of the Whites (32.7% and 28.7% respectively against 11.3%), which revived the racial tensions, sometimes exploding in violence as in Los Angeles in May 1992.

At the same time, the corporations, on the pretext of improving their competitive positions, cut their payrolls. Thus IBM, which “never laid off workers,” let go more than 40,000 salaried employees, and every day major oil and automotive groups announced employment reductions in the thousands. The country dove into recession, and growth remained too weak to generate new jobs.

In this dark context, the distrust of politicians partly explained the relative success of the third presidential candidate, Ross Perot, and of his populist speeches hostile to the politico-media “class.”

For the first time, the Americans were not confident of being able to offer their children a life better than theirs. Many placed their hopes in the opportunities promised by the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed on October 7, 1992, creating a commercial union whose GNP was 18 percent larger than that of the European union.

The only field where it continued to reign single-handedly was in the industries of the imagination—films, television shows, music, and fashion—where it continued to surprise the world with their expressive and telling force. But, unlike in the Fifties, the propagation of this mass culture did not result in the export of industrial products or concrete goods. By the beginning of the Nineties, even the process of world Americanization had ceased to be the exclusive province of the Americans.

So much so that, at the time of the 1992 election, the electorate voted against the winner of the Gulf War, George Bush, whom they

would reproach having lost the domestic battle: against the growing unemployment, for job creation, against racial discrimination, for the revival of the dilapidated cities, for personal security, and against other thousands of inequalities.

By choosing William Clinton, a democrat, and his program of moderate social progress, the Americans had indicated their priority: improvements on the domestic front.

But even in 1997, a year after Clinton's new victory in the election of November 5, 1996, what did we have?

There are periods in the history of the world where the hegemony of one State, because of the defeat or the deterioration of its principal rivals, can exercise its influence suddenly without competition over the entire extent of the planet. By turns, since the 16th century, three powers—Spain, France and England—have dominated the Earth militarily, economically and, partly, culturally.

The British Empire made its truly great strides only after the rout of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815), and its domination was ended only with the rise of German ambitions, cause of the First and Second World Wars. These two conflicts exhausted the Old Continent and were the occasion for the entrance onto the international relations scene of the major political actor of the 20th century: the United States of America. After 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union—the other super power of the moment—established a kind of world condominium characterized by a furious competition which one would come to call the Cold War.

This confrontation, as we know, was ended by the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. On an international scale, the United States thus found itself a country placed in a situation of supremacy that no power had known in more than a century. From this point

forward, notes Paul-Marie de La Gorce: "The American empire is the only one in the world; its is an exclusive hegemony, and this is the first time that this strange phenomenon occurs in the history of humanity."

Admittedly, in the contemporary world, the predominance of an empire is no longer measured by geographical influence alone. In addition to its fantastic military attributes, its power results primarily from the supremacy in the control of the economic system, of the financial flows, technological innovations, trade, and other reaches and overextensions (material and immaterial) of all kinds. In this respect, no one dominates the Earth so much, its oceans and its surrounding space, as the United States.

Conscious of its new-found assets, riding high on a blazing economy, America took up its claims to want to direct international politics. On the score of foreign affairs, the United States' primacy was confirmed in particular after its diplomatic role in extremely delicate situations like the peace negotiations in the Middle East and in Bosnia.

America restored democratic legitimacy in Haiti; counteracted the intimidation of North Korea; reaffirmed its military strength in the Strait of Formosa when China rose to threaten Taiwan; imposed, by the Dayton Accords, a resolution to the Bosnian conflict, and guaranteed peace on the ground thanks to the presence of its troops; ensured, one way or another, the continuation of the negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; permitted, in Congo-Zaire, in May 1997, the forces of Laurent-Désiré Kabila to overthrow the corrupt and despotic regime of Marshal Mobutu; and finally, obliged Russia to sign an agreement with NATO which allows the eastward enlargement of the Western military alliance.

Here and there, calls are heard for American mediation to put

an end to an intractable political situation. For example: in Serbia, from the opposition who, during the winter of 1996-1997, protested against Milosevic, and even in Algeria, from Hocine Ait Ahmed, chief of the Front of Socialist Forces (FFS), who asked “to put an end to the spiral of violence.”

So much so that the United States tends more and more to act on the planetary chess-board (in particular, in Black Africa) according to their own criteria and to serve their own interests, without worrying too much about the opinion of international authorities like the United Nations. This is why, like sovereigns, they impose economic sanctions on Cuba, Libya and Iran, and opposed the re-election of Boutros-Ghali to the post of Secretary-General of the UN. And they rejected firmly (“It is clear, it is categorical, it is really not negotiable”) retorted William Cohen, the new Secretary for Defense, to France’s legitimate request to have the southern command of NATO assigned to a European officer. In their new propensity for hegemony, the United States even goes as far—as in the case of the Helms-Burton Law that strengthens the embargo against Cuba—as to claim that American legislation applies internationally.

But the principal victories, in Clinton’s eyes, are those which Washington gained on economic ground. On this front, the good news, in the view of liberal critics, is accumulating: four years of uninterrupted growth, more than ten million jobs created, as the official rate of unemployment (one of the lowest in the world) is less than 5.3% of the working population. Inflation was kept below 3%; the interest rates remain below 7%; the dollar, which had been kept rather low for a long time to support the rise of exports, has become a hard currency again, since February 1997, and finally, the budget deficit was cut in half, not exceed 2%.

Other significant victories on the international plane: the GATT Accords and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) which is devoted to the triumph of free trade; and the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada which created a market of 400 million consumers. For the rest, mistrust in regard to large international organizations—the UN, to start with—is being accentuated, and financial contributions have been reduced (the budget for aid to Africa was cut by 35%). On the other hand, every effort is being made to intensify the arms trade of which the United States remains the top exporter.

Trade and the economy in general remained first in the national priorities of this super power whose export of goods and services represents, since 1987, one third of the economic growth. Didn't Madeleine Albright, the new Secretary of State, affirm: "One of the major objectives of our government is to make sure that the economic interests of the United States are extended on a planetary scale."

As for the apparent victories on the domestic front, they mask a considerable reversal on the part of Clinton who, as soon as he was elected in 1992, gave up his social program and bowed to the instructions of "Master Market." And, still more apparent yet since the 1994 legislative victory of the Republicans who constrained him to compete on their (highly conservative) ground. During the 1996 campaign, candidate Clinton, disavowing his Keynesian precepts, ceaselessly affirmed that "the era of the interventionist State is over." Even if that worsened already glaring inequalities. 41 million citizens without medical coverage; a true urban apartheid has set in with ghettos abandoned to the poor and to violence, and the wealthy neighborhoods protecting themselves with walls and watchmen.

As for the jobs created by the millions, which, by the way, drives the Stock Exchange to despair, they are in fact precarious positions offering no benefits, and so badly paid that it is estimated that an employee must accumulate two or three of them to achieve a purchasing power similar to what he had in the Eighties. The middle class has shrunk; and is increasingly tired of the speeches of the neoconservative groups.

In this landscape of extremes, the spectacular rise of new technologies is fascinating. The Clinton era coincides with a fantastic domination in the fields of aeronautics, data processing, computer networks, etc. Not to mention the colossal potential of the American pension funds which constitute the principal force in the financial markets.

But, above all, there are the apotheosis of the Internet and the myth of the new frontier to which the “information highway” will lead. New empires are built on the foundations of the computer universe which Bill Gates, the owner of Microsoft, hopes to control in its entirety, through the power of his giant firm. The most spectacular economic battle is waged in the field of old media and the new media—turned upside down by the irruption of digital, virtual and multi-media technologies. Fantastic concentrations are going on there.

This new model made up of less government, of less social protection, and of dynamic communication, is spreading everywhere. In the eyes of many leaders, especially European, it appears to be the great answer to today’s challenges.

No other power, at present, can compete with America nor oppose its economic offensives. Is this the only reason to have the United States impose its law upon the world?



Chapter 3

Global Regimes

To any observer of the international scene nowadays it is quite clear that, in one way or another, coming from influential quarters, modernity is used as an alibi to justify bending everything to the uncompromising level of sterile uniformity. A similar lifestyle is imposed from one end of the planet to the other, disseminated by the media and prescribed by the bludgeoning of mass culture. From La Paz to Ouagadougou, Kyoto to Saint-Petersburg, Oran to Amsterdam, the same films, the same television series, the same information, the same songs, the same advertising slogans, the same objects, the same clothing, the same cars, the same town planning, the same architecture, the same type of apartments often furnished and decorated in an identical manner. . . In affluent neighborhoods of large cities across the world, the pleasure of diversity is giving way before the overpowering offensive of standardization, homogenization, uniformization. World culture, global culture, is triumphing everywhere.

Speed has exploded most human activities and especially those

that depend on transport and communication. Instantaneousness, omnivision and ubiquity, superior powers of the older divinities of Olympus, belong from now on to human beings. Never before, in the history of humanity, have the practices belonging to one culture been imposed as universal models so rapidly. Political and economic models such as parliamentary democracy and market economy, acknowledged now almost everywhere as “rational,” “natural” attitudes, are in fact part of the Westernization of the world.

Is it astonishing that, in response to this global leveling, explosive assertions of identity and traditionalist tensions are multiplying? Everywhere, fundamentalists of all kinds are rejecting the abstract view of modernity and reclaiming their roots in elementary ways; nationalists are re-appearing, exciting passions around fetishized cultural features. But what can these reactions (sometimes obscurantist, passé, archaic) amount to against the power of a movement that so strongly stimulates the globalization of the economy?

This globalization has been accentuated by the acceleration of trade between nations after the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947. Since the beginning of the Eighties, the speed of communications and their increasingly reduced costs led to an explosion of exchanges and has multiplied exponentially the commercial and financial flows. Increasing numbers of firms project themselves outside their country of origin and develop global networks; direct investment abroad is massively increased, growing three times more quickly than world trade. The speed of globalization is all the faster since flows are increasingly less material and increasingly relate to services such as data-processing, audio-visual telecommunication, messaging (electronic mail, Internet exchanges), etc.

However, the inter-penetration of the industrial, commercial

and financial markets poses serious problems of a political nature. Once confronted with a recession, many governments start to wonder about the benefits of this global economy, which they were struggling anyway to understand the true logic.

The Seventies saw the expansion of multinational corporations, compared at that time to octopuses having multiple extensions but depending very much on one center, located geographically, where the overall strategy was formulated and from which the instructions emanated.

The “global corporation” of today no longer has a center, it is an organization without body and without heart; it is just a network made up of various complementary elements, scattered across the planet and hinging upon each other according to a pure economic rationality, obeying to two master words: profitability and productivity. Thus, a French firm can borrow funds in Switzerland, install its research centers in Germany, buy its machines in South Korea, base its factories in China, plan its marketing and publicity campaign in Italy, sell in the United States and have limited partnerships in Poland, Morocco and Mexico.

Not only does the nationality of the firm dissolve in this insane dispersion but also, sometimes, its own personality. The American professor Robert Reich, ex-secretary of State of Labor during William Clinton’s first term, cites the example of the Japanese firm Mazda which, since 1991, “produces Ford Probes in the Mazda factory in Flat Rock, Michigan. Some of these cars are exported to Japan and are sold under the Ford brand. A Mazda commercial vehicle is manufactured in the Ford factory in Louisville, Kentucky, and then sold in the Mazda stores in the United States. Nissan, during this time, is designing a new light truck in San Diego, California. The trucks will be

assembled in a Ford factory in Ohio, with spare parts manufactured by Nissan in its Tennessee factory, and then marketed by Ford and Nissan in both the United States and Japan.” And Reich wonders: “Who is Ford? Nissan? Mazda?”

The employees in the firm’s countries of origin are integrated in spite of their own wishes into the international labor market. Leveling starts at the bottom; the lowest salaries and the least benefits win. The warnings of the International Labor Organization do not help at all.

Global corporations strive, through relocations and ceaseless increases in productivity, for maximum profit; this obsession leads them to produce where wage costs are lowest and to sell where the standards of living are highest. In the South, the relocations of factories aim to exploit and to take advantage of very cheap labor. In the North, automation, robotization and new organization of work involve downsizing which deeply traumatize the developed democratic societies, the more so as the destruction of millions of jobs is not compensated by job creation in other sectors.

These firms, far from being global are, in fact, “triadic,” i.e. they operate primarily in the three poles dominating the world economy: North America, Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific area. The global economy thus causes, paradoxically, a break-up of the planet between these three increasingly integrated poles and the rest of the countries (in particular, Black Africa) which are increasingly poor, marginalized, excluded from world trade and technological modernization.

Sometimes, speculative investments concentrate on one “emerging market” of the South because the local stock exchange offers prospects for easy, large profits, and because the authorities

promise enticing interest rates for pledged assets. But that by no means guarantees any economic takeoff. For far more quickly than it came, capital can flee from one market to another, as Mexico tasted bitterly in 1994.

Mexico escaped total bankruptcy only thanks to massive international aid of more than 50 billion dollars (including 20 billion from the United States), the largest assistance ever granted to a country. So large that one wonders whether its aim was to save Mexico (whose oil came under the control of the United States, who thus took revenge on President Lazaro Cardenas who, in 1938, had nationalized the American oil companies. . .), or if it aimed rather to save the international financial system.

When one considers that the same response was not made to other situations of equal urgency, for example to Rwanda, devastated by genocide, that is the only conclusion that is warranted. Practically no loans were made to Russia, either: it has actually received, since 1990, (through 1996 t.n.) only 3 billion dollars in direct assistance when its needs are gigantic. Lastly, no significant help was delivered to Gaza in the West Bank, beyond a paltry few tens of millions, whereas one would need hundreds of them in order to reduce the tensions and to finally keep the promises of the Oslo accord.

One only wanders to what degree of nonsense has the international financial system evolved? It obeys the only one rule of "every man for himself." There is no one refereeing in a game that is organized according to no rules, except that of maximum profit. But at least, this crisis has revealed, in everyone's eyes, who are the new Masters of Geofinance: they are the managers of pensions funds and investment funds. It is they whom, in the language of the experts, the economic press calls: "the markets." We know the astronomical size

of the sums mobilized by these managers (the American pension funds alone represent 6,000 billion dollars. . .), and it is predicted that their brutal displacement would cause a Day of Reckoning. Mexico, first, has experienced the shock. It lost part of its national sovereignty in the process.

Just as, in the 19th century, the largest banks dictated their opinion to countries or as the multinational corporations did between the Sixties and Eighties, the private funds of the financial markets hold now in their power the destiny of many countries, and, to a certain extent, the economic fate of the world. If they lose confidence tomorrow in China (where direct foreign investments, in 1994, reached 32 billion dollars), the more exposed countries (Hungary, Argentina, Brazil, Turkey, Thailand, Indonesia) would see capital withdrawn in a bout of panic, causing both their own bankruptcy and the bankruptcy of the system not unlike the domino model.

Furthermore, the fall the British bank of Barings, in 1995, confirmed that, contrary to the myth promoted by politically correct thinking (*la pensée unique*), “open markets” do not function perfectly and private capital does not have a monopoly on wisdom. Considered “infallible,” the markets are in fact still seriously misguided. But—thanks to government assistance, using tax dollars—the “markets” were not penalized; such an action, in itself, constitutes a distortion of liberal dogma, that the liberals took care to denounce heretofore. Instead, another unadvertised cardinal rule was once again proven infallible: to capital, the most fabulous returns, and to the community, losses.

In a global economy neither capital, not labor, nor raw materials constitute in themselves the determining economic factor. What is important is the optimal relation between these three factors. To

establish this relation, “the global corporation” takes account neither of borders nor of regulations, but only of intelligent exploitation of information, of the organization of labor, and of the revolution of management. That often means dividing loyalties within a single country: “The American software engineer, tied to his worldwide network by computers and faxes,” writes Robert Reich, “is more dependent on engineers in Kuala Lumpur, manufacturers in Taiwan, bankers in Tokyo and Bonn, and sales and marketing specialists in Paris and Milan than on routine workers carrying on their activity in a factory located on the other side of the city.” Thus the interest of the firm is divorced from the interest of the community, and the logic of the market is divorced from that of democracy.

Global corporations do not consider this to be their concern in the least. They subcontract and sell throughout the whole world, and assert a supranational character which enables them to act with great freedom since there does not exist, practically speaking, any international institution of political, economic or legal character able to effectively regulate their behavior.

The great economic authorities—the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank—are undergoing a structural crisis. The globalization of the economy has destabilized these organizations, which were created at the end of the Second World War. GATT, obsessed with customs duties, was no longer controlling the problems of competition and market access. It seemed to be suffering from obsolescence by the end of the Uruguay Round and was replaced, in 1995, with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The internationalization of the monetary system, resulting from the Bretton Woods conference (1944) and already damaged in 1971 by the unilateral decision of the United States to suspend the

convertibility of the dollar into gold, has now picked up speed due to the globalization of the money and financial markets. “The big-bang” (computerization) of the stock exchanges and deregulation on a grand scale allow the flow of capital to move at the speed of light, twenty-four hours a day, stimulating fantastic financial speculation.

Financial transactions go on without interruption; speculators can intervene, in real time, on the markets of Tokyo, London and New York. The volume of financial transactions is ten times greater than that of trade. The financial economy has more clout, by far, than the real economy. The perpetual motion of currencies and interest rates has become a factor of instability, all the more dangerous for being autonomous and increasingly disconnected from political power.

This immense economic, financial and policy rupture brought about by the globalization of the economy has not yet been analyzed seriously. Globalization, for several years the object of multiple sector-specific works, in particular on its economic, financial, technological and cultural dimensions, has seldom been apprehended as a whole, as a pendulum swing of civilization. However, it is the ultimate result of economism, “of the unthinkable being born under our very eyes”—“global” man, i.e. the infra-human atom, emptied of culture, direction, and awareness of the other.

The final result, preventable but already palpably present, is a combination of the three dynamics that are converging explosively upon humanity at this end of century. They are: globalization of the economy, the ultimate avatar of Western modernity, dating from Europe’s worldwide expansion in the 15th century; reducing the role of the State—which may ring the death knell of politics and civil society all together; and the generalized destruction of cultures, North and South alike, by the steamroller of communication, mercantiliza-

tion and technology.

The principal theoretical base of this vision, consensual, yet at the same time despairing, borrow some postulates from Marxism (while turning them around): a naive claim to being scientific (“the Club of Reason”), eschatological evocation of “a radiant future,” and indifference with regard to its own failures.

The most worrisome thing about this ideological use of globalization is, obviously, that it condemns in advance—in the interests of “realism”—any inclination toward resistance or even dissidence. Thus any republican initiative, any search for alternatives, any attempt at democratic regulation, any criticism of the market, is condemned with opprobrium or is defined as populist. Globalization is neither an inevitable fate nor “an accident” of history. It constitutes a great challenge to confront and a potential brutality to be controlled, that is, in the final analysis, to be civilized. We must resist politically this obscure dissolution of politics itself into resignation and hopelessness.

Even more paradoxical, this globalization obscures, behind the appearance of a post-industrial and computerized modernity (the fascination of the Internet), a development that is politically “reactionary” in the strict sense of the term. That is, an incremental dismantling of the democratic gains, an abandonment of the European social contract, a return (under cover of “adaptation” and “competitiveness”) to the primitive capitalism of the 19th century. That is confirmed every year, when, in the heart of winter, the leading figures in charge of the planet—heads of state, bankers, financiers, owners of the great multinational corporations—find themselves in Davos, a small Swiss city, giving a report on the progress for the market economy, free trade and deregulation.

A meeting of the new Masters of the Universe, the economic

forum of Davos has become the Mecca of hyper-liberalism; the capital of globalization and the central hearth of politically correct thinking.

For the most part, the two thousand global leaders ritually confirm there that inflation must be fought, budget deficits reduced, a restrictive monetary policy continued, work flexibility encouraged, the Welfare state dismantled and free exchange stimulated without let up. They praise countries' increasing openness to world trade and governments' efforts to reduce deficits, expenditure and taxes, and they applaud privatization everywhere. According to them, there is no political or economic alternative; caught up in the market and stimulated by the Internet, the world is, to some extent, seeing the end of history.

Competition remains, in their eyes, the sole motivating force. "Whether one is an individual, a corporation or a country," Helmut Maucher, for example, the owner of Nestle, has stated, "the most important thing for survival in this world is to be more competitive than one's neighbor." And woe to the government that does not follow this line. "The markets would penalize it immediately," warned Hans Tietmeyer, President of the Bundesbank, "because politicians are now under the control of the financial markets." Similarly, Marc Blondel, Secretary General of the French trade union Workers' Force, observed at Davos in 1996, "The public powers are, at best, only a subcontractor of the corporation. The market controls. The government manages."

The triumphant tone is not lacking. Nevertheless, since 1996, hovering over this learned assembly of the world elites one has felt the sensation that a period of euphoria was finished. In this respect, the revolt of French employees in December 1995 undoubtedly sounded an alarm. For even these global leaders cannot fail to see that the

biggest event of this end of century is the pauperization of Western Europe.

It is a major blot on the ledger. Professor Klaus Schwab, founder of the Forum of Davos, formulated the first warning himself: "Globalization has entered a very critical phase. The counter-reaction is felt more and more. It is reasonable to fear that it may have an extremely harmful impact on the economic activity and the political stability of many countries."

Other experts make an even more pessimistic report. Thus, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, former director of the *Harvard Business Review* and author of the work *The World Class*, warned: "It is necessary to create confidence among the employees, and to organize co-operation among companies so that local communities, cities and regions profit from globalization. If not, we will see a resurgence of social movements like we haven't seen since the Second World War." It is also the great fear of Percy Barnevik, head of Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), one of the world's principal energy companies. He gave this cry of alarm: "If the corporations do not take up the challenges of poverty and unemployment, tensions will increase between the haves and the have-nots, and there will be a considerable increase in terrorism and violence."

This concern spreads even in the milieu most accustomed to liberalism. The US senator, Bill Bradley (D), revealed that, "Because of the current competitive fury, increasingly precarious employment and falling wages, the American middle class lives worse and worse, and has to work harder and harder to maintain their standard of living." This is why the American weekly magazine *Newsweek* did not hesitate, on February 26, 1996, to denounce *killer capitalism*, nailing to the wall the twelve big employers who, in recent years, laid off

more than 363,000 employees! “There was a time when mass layoffs were a shame, an infamy. Today, the more the jobs are cut, the happier the stock exchange. . . ,” says this newspaper which, also, fears a violent counter-reaction against globalization.

“Globalization is creating, in our industrial democracies, a kind of subclass of demoralized and impoverished people,” affirms the former American Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich. He announced that firms that have failed in their civic duty by reducing the number of their employees would be penalized by the State, obliged to pay an additional tax.

The role of the State, in a global economy, is uncomfortable. It no longer controls the exchange of information, nor the flow of money or of goods, yet we continue, in spite of everything, to hold it responsible for the education of the citizens and the domestic law and order, two missions very much dependent on the general situation of the economy. . . The State is no longer totalitarian but the economy, in the age of globalization, tends to become so more and more.

At one time, one labeled “totalitarian” those single-party regimes that did not tolerate any organized opposition, neglected the rights of the individual in favor of the State, and in which political power supremely directed every activity of the dominated society.

These regimes, characteristic of the Thirties, are being succeeded by another type of totalitarianism in this end of century, that of “global regimes.” Resting on the dogmas of globalization and of the politically correct thinking, they do not allow any other economic policy, they neglect the social rights of the citizen on behalf of competition, and give up to the financial markets all management of the activities of the dominated society.

In our tumultuous societies, people are aware of the power of

this new totalitarianism. According to a recent public opinion survey, 64% of those questioned estimated that “in fact, the financial markets have the most power today in France,” more than “politicians” (52%) and “the media” (50%). After the agricultural economy, which prevailed for millennia, after the industrial economy that marked the 19th and 20th centuries, we have the era of the global financial economy.

Globalization has killed the national market, which is one of the power bases of the nation-state. By wiping that out, it has altered national capitalism and decreased the role of the public powers. States no longer have the means to oppose the market. With central banks having become independent, States have only their exchange reserves to counter a possible hostile currency movement. However, the volume of these reserves is ridiculously low compared to the firepower of the markets.

States lack the means to restrain the fantastic flows of capital, or to counter any market actions that are against their interests and those of their citizens. Governments agree to adhere to the general instructions of economic policy laid down by global organizations like the International Monetary Fund (the IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In Europe, the famous “criteria for convergence” established by the Maastricht Treaty (reduced public debt, external accounts without serious distortions, inflation well in hand) exert a true dictatorship on the policy of the States, weaken the base of democracy, and aggravate the social suffering.

If leaders still affirm their belief in the autonomy of politics, their will to resist looks like a bluff, since they claim, with vehement insistence, “efforts to adapt” to this situation. However, in such circumstances, what does *adapt* mean? Quite simply, to admit the supremacy of the markets and the impotence of the politicians, or, in

other words, to agree “to be tied hand and foot in a world that is being imposed on everyone.”

Such is the logic of these global regimes that, while supporting monetarism, deregulation, free trade, the free flow of capital and massive privatization, for the two last decades, political leaders have allowed the transfer of major decisions (regarding investment, employment, health, education, culture, environmental protection) from the public sphere to the private sphere. This is why, already at the present time, more than half of the top two hundred economies in the world are not countries but corporations.

The phenomenon of multinationalization of the economy developed in a spectacular way. In the Seventies, the number of multinational societies did not exceed several hundred; today their number is very close to 40,000. . . . And if one considers the overall sales of the 200 principal firms of the planet, the amount represents more than a quarter of the world economic activity; and yet, these 200 firms employ only 18.8 million employees, that is less than 0.75% of the planet’s labor

At the beginning of the Nineties, some 37,000 multinational firms, with their 170,000 subsidiaries, encompassed the international economy in their tentacles. The top 200 are conglomerates whose planetary activities cover the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors without distinction: huge farms, manufacturing production, financial services, trade, etc.; geographically, they are distributed among ten countries: Japan (62), the United States (53), Germany (23), France (19), United Kingdom (11), Switzerland (8), South Korea (6), Italy (5), and Netherlands (4).

General Motors’ sales are higher than the gross national product (GNP) of Denmark, Ford’s are greater than the GNP of South

Africa, and Toyota's exceeds the GNP of Norway. And we are dealing, here, with the real economy that which produces and exchanges concrete goods and services. If we add the key players of the financial economy, that is, the principal American and Japanese pension funds that dominate the financial markets, the weight of the states becomes almost negligible.

More and more countries, which sold their public firms to the private sector en masse and deregulated their markets, have become the property of great multinational groups. Those dominate whole sectors of the economy in the South; they use the local governments to apply pressure within the international forums and to obtain political decisions most favorable to the continuation of their global domination.

Thus, the new reality of world power largely eludes the States. Globalization and deregulation of the economy support the emergence of new powers which, with the assistance of modern technologies, overwhelm and permanently transgress the official structures.

When the economic model is that of tax havens, and "the markets" thereby penalize (in the name of fighting inflation) job creation and growth, isn't that an irrational perversion in the realm of finance?

The mechanism that can stop this race to disaster, in the phase of globalizing glaciation, that we are approaching, is that of a dissidence gradually enrolling a critical mass of citizens who have decided to make their elementary rights prevail and to support the advent of a true political society. This dissidence starts with the refusal of the economic theology which entrusted the government of the world to the market, to loosen the #LOOK UP adjustments, to center them on the domestic market and not on exports, to moderate competition, to

restore planning, to moderate the gambling of speculation, to use Europe as a lever for social planning, etc.

Little time is left, for many signs indicate that a disconcerting question has returned to our troubled societies: has democracy been hijacked by a small group of the privileged who use it nearly exclusively for their own benefit?

Considering that the Republic was really based on “the social contract”—as Jean-Jacques Rousseau taught—this same interrogation led the revolutionary socialists (from Karl Marx to Trotsky, Blanqui, Bakunin and Lenin) to fight “bourgeois democracy” in the name of freedom for more than a century, and led, some of them, to dream of a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” At the same time, in the name of ethnic nationalism, the extreme right has sought to cut down “parliamentarism.”

The military defeat of fascism in 1945, then the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989, would seem to have settled the question. Francis Fukuyama’s thesis on “the end of history” could assert that democracy was the final limit of any political regime. And everyone recalls Winston Churchill’s celebrated aphorism, “Democracy is the worst system . . . except for all the others.”

Indeed, democracy has spread spectacularly. To such an extent that, a rarity on the eve of the Second World War, democracy has become the dominant political regime. And yet, increasing numbers of people are denouncing this system as an impostor . . .

In France, the number of job cuts exceeded, on average, 35,000 per month in 1996. . . The employment hemorrhage is reaching scandalous proportions, in particular in labor-intensive industries: textiles, shoes, agro-alimentary, electric household appliances, cars, construction. This last sector alone lost 24,000 jobs in one year.

Apparel, 15,000 in one six-month period . . .

France already lost more than 1.8 million industrial jobs, and the rate of unemployment reached 12.3% of the working population, a historical record. However, corporations continue to announce a series of “social plans” aiming to reduce the payrolls as much in public firms (Aerospace, France Telecom, Sernam) as in private groups (Pechiney, Moulinex, Peugeot).

In addition, on the eve of big mergers, the banks are considering the elimination of some 40,000 jobs. An identical bleeding is in the works in the insurance, aeronautics and multi-media sectors. And let’s not forget to add the 24% drop in the army payroll, decided by the Defense Ministry. All that, for many towns, means economic death.

Meanwhile, in Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, in the whole of the European Union, downsizing continues. Everywhere, unemployment and under-employment are spreading, wages are frozen, and the social budgets drastically reduced in the name of all-holy competitiveness.

Inequalities continue to grow, so that certain European States have come to accept a kind of third-worldization of their societies. Thus, according to recent reports from the UN, the World Bank and the OECD: “In the United Kingdom, the inequalities between rich and poor are the highest in the Western world, comparable to those existing in Nigeria, and deeper than those which one finds, for example, in Jamaica, Sri Lanka or Ethiopia.” In less than fifteen years, a two-tier society was built with a layer of *rentiers* on top of those on public assistance . . .

Everywhere in Europe, social rifts have reached dangerous proportions; at the top, an increasingly wealthy class is gathering strength (10% of the French, for example, hold 55% of the national

wealth) while at the bottom, the pits of poverty grow deeper. Moreover, it is known that citizens too deprived, marginalized, and excluded are unable to benefit from formal freedoms and to take advantage of their rights.¹

All that is going on within a general economic framework where finance triumphs. The financial markets exert an influence so colossal that it enables them to impose their will on political leaders. Just as, at one time, one could say that “two hundred families” controlled the destiny of France, one can now affirm that “two hundred managers” control the destiny of planet. Governments are abandoning any pretense of autonomous budget policy and agree to obey an economic logic perfectly foreign to the social concerns of the citizens.

This is no doubt why—since the politicians now agree to submit to the domination by the economy and the dictatorship of the markets—the democratic system is spreading without hindrance across the planet. At one time any attempt to establish democracy was savagely opposed by the holders of capital, usually in collusion with the armed forces.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the overthrow of Salvador Allende, President of Chile (1973)—examples of democratic regimes tragically cut down because they were prepared to reduce inequalities by distributing the wealth more equitably are not lacking. That is because they intended to nationalize (to put at the service of the nation) the strategic sectors of the economy. Democracy thus supposes that the economy will be dominated by politics, for the benefit of the citizens.

Today, democracy equates to the dismantling the state sector, privatization, enrichment of a small caste of privileged people, etc. Everything is sacrificed (and, first of all, the well being of the people)

to the imperative of the financial economy. In this respect, in Europe, the criteria for convergence imposed by the Treaty of Maastricht have become almost constitutional absolutes, to the great dismay of the million outcasts.

Added to the cynicism of governments (which, merely elected, hasten to disavow the promises made during their election campaigns) the disproportionate weight of special interest groups, and the rise of corruption in the political community—all such novel developments make one unable to avoid noticing that this derelict democracy supports, above all, the expansion of the extreme right. How can we fail to understand the anger of the people, all over the European Union, confronted with this tide of injustices?

Will common sense carry the day? Will we finally admit that without social development there cannot be satisfactory economic development? And that one cannot build a solid economy on a society in ruins?

Chapter 4

The PPII (Planetary, Permanent, Immediate and Immaterial) System

We face a crisis of intelligibility: a widening gap between that which we have to understand and the conceptual tools necessary for comprehension. With the disappearance of certitude and the absence of a shared view, must we resign ourselves to experiencing what Max Weber called the “disenchantment of the world?” A world shaken by fantastic technological shifts, persistent economic upheavals and rising ecological dangers. These three rays of disorder are translated, in particular, into social distress, an explosion of inequalities, the appearance of new forms of poverty and exclusion, a crisis in the value of work, the profound anxiety of those in power, massive unemployment, the progression of the irrational, the proliferation of nationalist passions, fundamentalism, xenophobia and, simultaneously, by a very strong demand for morals and increasing ethical concerns.

In this context of disappointment and uncertainty, two new paradigms structure our thinking.

The first is *communication*. This keyword is attempting to increasingly replace in importance one of the major paradigms of the last two centuries: the paradigm of progress. Following one's life from school to the corporate world, from family to civil society, and to government, in every field and institution, there is only one watchword nowadays: we must communicate.

For the past hundred years, in the name of the philosophy of progress (scientific, cultural, social, economic), the leadership of democracies has elevated the level of public education, developed social rights, and increased the purchasing power of underprivileged classes. The goal was to reduce the inequalities among individuals by nurturing the most deprived. Starting from the premise that a civilized society is a society that has excluded violence from its bosom, and that inequalities, when they reach scandalous proportions, lead to violence—progress was employed in order to reduce both.

But replacing the ideology of progress by that of communication has the consequence of bringing a widespread wave of upheavals and brings confusing as to the very purpose of political power. It sets up a central competition, increasingly grating to the social body, between the powers that be and the mass media. In particular, it drives leaders to openly reject social goals of primary importance, established in the name of "equality" and "fraternity." This new paradigm is better accomplished, better carried out, better implemented by the media than by the executive powers.

The other paradigm is the *market*. It replaces the machine, represented by the well-adjusted clock, as well as the notion of a human organization whose mechanisms and operation ensured a system's development. In a clock, no piece is extraneous, and all the elements, all the parts are interdependent. Succeeding this mechanical

metaphor, inherited from the 18th century (a society is “a social clock,” and each individual exerts a function useful to the correct operation of the unit) a newer model emerges, an economic and financial metaphor. Now, everything must be controlled according to the criteria of “Master Market,” the ultimate panacea. New values take the top billing: profit, earnings, return on investment, competition, and competitiveness.

“The laws” of the market have replaced the laws of mechanics (which govern the life of the stars, the cosmos and nature), and of history, as a general explanation of the movement of societies.

There, only the strongest make it, in all legitimacy; the weakest are excluded. Life is a struggle, a jungle. Economic Darwinism and social Darwinism (constant appeals to competition, selection, adaptation) are imposed as though their superiority were self-evident.

In this new order, individuals are divided into the “solvent” and the “insolvent,” i.e. suited to integration into the market or unsuited. The market offers safety only to the solvent. The others tend to be rejected, expelled, marginalized, excluded, for in the new social configuration (in which loyalty is no longer required) “the losers” can be treated as rejects.

These two new paradigms—*communication* and *the market*—constitute the pillars on which the current world system rests. Here the only activities that can prosper are those that have four principal attributes: *planetary, permanent, immediate* and *immaterial*. This tetralogy is the spearhead of globalization, the major phenomenon and determinant factor of our time.

What is the PPII system? It is a system that stimulates all the activities (financial, commercial, cultural, media) having four principal qualities: planetary, permanent, immediate and immaterial. Four

characteristics which recall the four principal attributes of God himself. And, in fact, this system sets itself up as a modern divinity, demanding subservience, faith, worship and new liturgies. Nowadays everything tends to be organized according to the PPII criteria: stock exchange values, trade, monetary values, information, communication, television programs, multimedia, cyberculture, etc. This is why we talk so much about “globalization” and “one world.”

The central model is the financial market. It presents itself as not being derived from natural sciences, from Newtonian mechanics or organic chemistry, but as pure sciences: probability theory, game theory, the theory of chaos, fuzzy logic and life sciences.

At the heart of this system is money. Chance, uncertainty and disorder become strong parameters by which to measure the new harmony of a world where poverty, illiteracy, violence and diseases progress without ceasing. A world where the richest fifth of the population has 80% of the resources, while the poorest fifth has hardly 0.5% . . . a world, in short, where the size of the transactions on the monetary and financial markets represents approximately fifty times the value of international trade . . .

Fascinated by the short term view and immediate profits, the markets are unable to provide for the future, to anticipate what is to become of mankind and the environment, to plan for urban expansion, to reduce inequalities, to mend the social rift.

Who, at this end of century, are the true masters of the universe? Who, beneath the surface, holds the real power? Posing such questions is tantamount to admitting that, generally, those who govern, elected after Homeric electoral battles, find themselves impotent in the face of frightening forces, planetary in scope. They are by no means, as certain science fiction novels propose, a kind of clandest-

tine group plotting in the shadows to win political control of the Earth. Rather, forces are working through them thanks to the strict implementation of the popular version of neoliberalism, and obey precise keywords: free trade, privatization, monetarism, competitiveness, and productivity. Their slogan could be: “All power to the markets!”

Finance, trade and the media, among other fields stimulated by new technologies, have given birth and have seen a true explosion of novel economic empires that evolve their own accounting laws, relocate their industrial plants, move their capital at the speed of light, and invest from one end of the planet to the other. They know neither borders, nor States, nor cultures; they make a mockery of national sovereignties. Indifferent to the social consequences, they speculate against currencies, cause recessions, and sermonize to governments.

The latter, when they are not in complicity, seem to be in disarray. They are incapable of solving, at their level, thousand of major problems—including massive unemployment caused by the new conquerors’ approach to money making. In such a situation, the citizens are taken more and more by mistrust for the “elites,” and they wonder what political reform it would take, on an international scale, to impose democratic control over these new Masters of the Universe.

Those who, in a democracy, survive interminable election battles to conquer Power democratically, do they know that, in this end of century, power lies elsewhere? That it has deserted these very places which politics defines? Don’t they run the risk of, very quickly, displaying the spectacle of their impotence, of being forced to disavow themselves, and to admit that true power is elsewhere—out of reach.

A large French weekly magazine recently published a survey on the “50 most influential men on the planet.” Not a single head of state or government, not a minister or a deputy, not an elected official

of any country, appeared in it. Another weekly magazine devoted one to the “most influential man in the world.” Who did it turn out to be? William Clinton? Helmut Kohl? Boris Yeltsin? No. Quite simply, Bill Gates, the owner of Microsoft, which dominates the strategic information markets and who is preparing to control the information highways.

The last two decades of fantastic scientific and technological breakthroughs, in several fields, have stimulated the ultra-liberal theses of “laissez faire, laissez passer.” And the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist regimes, in addition, encouraged them. The globalization of the exchanges of information, in particular, was fabulously accelerated by the revolution in data processing and communication.

The latter, in concrete terms, were the catalyst for the explosion—the famous *big-bangs*—in two sectors, the true nervous systems of modern societies: the financial markets and information networks.

The transmission of data at the speed of light (300,000 kilometers per second); the digitalization of texts, images and sounds; the use of telecommunications satellites, which have already become banal; the revolution of telephony; the dissemination of data processing throughout most sectors of production and services; the miniaturization of computers and their establishment within the planetary network of the Internet has, increasingly, upset the order of the world, particularly the financial world. Data interchange takes place instantaneously, twenty-four hours by twenty-four, from one end of the Earth to the other. The principal stock exchanges are connected and function in a loop, non-stop. While, throughout the world, in front of their electronic screens, thousands of overqualified young people, exceptionally gifted, spend their days hanging on the telephone. They are

the clerks of the market. They interpret the new economic rationality, which is always right. And before which any argument—a *fortiori* if it is of a social or humane nature—must give way.

Generally, however, the markets function so to speak blindly, by integrating parameters basically borrowed from sorcery or the psychology of the bazaar. This is all the more clear, given its new characteristics. The financial market has put in place several new types of products—derivatives, futures—extremely complex and volatile, which few experts know well, and which give them—not without risks, as the debacle of Barings, the British bank, showed in 1995—a considerable advantage in transactions. There are hardly a few dozen in the world who know how to act usefully, that is, for their greatest benefit—on the exchange rates of these securities and currencies. They are regarded as “the Market Masters.”

Against the power of these mastodons of finance, the State can do practically nothing. Mexico’s financial crisis, which began at the end of December 1994, showed that clearly. What are the cumulative reserves, in the currencies of the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Canada—that is to say, the world’s seven richest countries—compared to the financial fire power of the private investment funds, for the most part Anglo-Saxon or Japanese? Not much. By way of example, let us consider that the largest financial effort ever authorized in modern economic history in favor of one country—in fact Mexico—the great States of the planet (including the United States), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, jointly, managed to put together approximately 50 billion dollars. A considerable sum. Ah well, the top three American pension funds alone—the *Big Three* of today—Fidelity Investment, Vanguard Group and Capital Research and Management, control 500

billion dollars . . .

The managers of these funds concentrate in their hands financial power of a whole new order of magnitude, more than any Secretary of the Treasury or any governor of a Central Bank in the world. In a market that has become instantaneous and planetary in scale, any abrupt displacement of these genuine mammoths of finance can lead to the economic destabilization of any country.

Political leaders of the principal planetary powers, meeting together within the framework of the international forum of Davos (Switzerland), stated clearly, in 1996, how much they feared the superhuman power of these fund managers, whose fabulous wealth was completely free from government control, and who act however they see fit in the cyberspace of geofinance, which constitutes a new kind of frontier, a new territory on which the fate of a large part of the world hangs—without any social contract, without ratification, without laws, except for those arbitrarily set by the principal protagonists for their own greater benefit.

Which led Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ex-secretary general of the United Nations, to state: “The reality of world power largely escapes the States, because globalization so strongly implies the emergence of new powers which transcend the official structures.”

Among these new powers, the mass media seems to be one of most powerful and most frightening. The conquest of massive audiences on a planetary scale sets loose epic battles. Industrial groups are engaged in a battle to the death for the control of the resources of multimedia and the information highways which, according to American Vice President Al Gore, “represent for the United States of today what the infrastructures of roadway transport represented the middle of the 20th century.”

For the first time in world history, audio-visual messages (information, programs and songs) are addressed permanently, by the means of channels of television relayed by satellite, to the whole planet. There are currently two planet-wide channels—*Cable News Network (CNN)* and *Music Television (MTV)*—but tomorrow there will be dozens, which will upset manners and cultures, ideas and debates. They will parasite, or short-circuit the word of governments, as well as their actions.

Groups more powerful than States are raiding the most invaluable asset of democracies: information. Will they impose their law on the whole world or, on the contrary, open a new expanse of freedom for the citizen? Are we astonished that, in such circumstances, in the United States in particular, the inequalities of wealth continue to worsen? And that, as the *International Herald Tribune* noted on April 19, 1995: “1% of the wealthiest people control approximately 40% of the national wealth, that is to say twice as much as in the United Kingdom, which is the most inegalitarian country of Western Europe.”

Neither Ted Turner of CNN, or Rupert Murdoch of News Limited Corporation, nor Bill Gates of Microsoft, Jeffrey Vinik of Fidelity Investment, Larry Rong of China Trust and International Investment, nor Robert Allen of AT&T, no more than the dozens of other new masters of the universe, has ever submitted his future plans to universal vote. Democracy is not for them. They are above these interminable discussions where concepts like public property, social happiness, freedom and equality still make sense. They have no time to lose. Their money, their products and their ideas are crossing the borders of a globalized market without restraint.

In their eyes, political power is but the third power. First, there is economic power, then media power. And when one has two of

them—as Berlusconi demonstrated in Italy—seizing political power is nothing but a formality.

This is why so many citizens continue searching for direction and values. Once again, everyone feels the need for defining a common plan, a finality, a grand design. How to put order in a world that is exploding on all sides, and where civil wars, ethnic wars and religious wars multiply? What intellectual instruments will help us to understand it? What rationality, which logic is relevant to today's conflicts?

Once again, a new world is heralded. . . . But many citizens in France (where there are three million unemployed, one million on welfare, five million outcasts) think we are entering a world where degeneration, drama and tragedy are possible, that the political leadership by no means has a grip on the problems. And the fantastic potential of hidden revolt, as one could see in December 1995, begins to rumble.

For, indeed, in contemporary democracies, free citizens increasingly feel stuck, mired in a kind of viscous doctrine which, imperceptibly, envelopes any rebellious reasoning, inhibits it, disturbs it, paralyzes it and ends up choking it. This doctrine is the doctrine of politically correct thinking (“*la pensée unique*”), the only one authorized by an invisible and omnipresent opinion police.

The arrogance, the disdainfulness and the insolence of this doctrine has reached such a degree since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the communist regimes and the demoralization of socialism, that one can, without exaggeration, qualify this new ideological fury as a modern dogmatism.

What is politically correct thinking (“*la pensée unique*”)? It is the translation into ideological terms, with a claim to being universal,

of the interests of an ensemble of economic forces, in particular those of international capital. It was formulated and defined, so to speak, in 1944, at the time of the Bretton Woods Conference. Its principal sources are the great economic and monetary institutions—the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization, the European Commission, Bundesbank, Banque de France, etc.—which, by their financing, enroll in the service of their ideas, throughout the planet, many universities, research centers, and foundations which, in their turn, refine and spread the fine words.

This is taken up and replicated by the principal organs of economic information and in particular by the “bibles” of investors and stock-brokers: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the Reuters agency, etc.—properties, often, of great industrial or financial groups. Here, there and everywhere, economics departments, journalists, essayists and, finally, politicians, repeat the principal commands of these new Tablets of the Law and, relayed through the major media, repeat them to satiety—knowing pertinently that, in our media societies, repetition is as good as proof.

The first principle of politically correct thinking (“la pensée unique”) is all the stronger since an inattentive Marxist would not disavow it: economics is more powerful than politics.

In the name of “realism” and “pragmatism” (which Alain Minc formulates in the following way: “Capitalism cannot break down, it is the natural state of society. Democracy is not the natural state of society. The market is.”) The economy is placed in command. An economy relieved of all social obstacles, which is seen as a sort of pathetic scum whose weight would bring about regression and crisis.

The other key concepts of politically correct thinking (“la pensée unique”) are familiar: the market, whose “invisible hand corrects the rough spots and the dysfunctions of capitalism,” and very specifically the financial markets whose “signals direct and determine the general movement of the economy;” competition and competitiveness, which “stimulate and energize firms, bringing them to a permanent and beneficial modernization;” free trade without borders as “a factor of uninterrupted development of trade and thus of societies;” globalization of manufacturing production as well as of financial flows; the international division of labor that “moderates the demands of trade-union claims and lowers labor costs;” hard currency, “a factor of stabilization;” deregulation; privatization; liberalization, etc. Always “less government,” a constant arbitrage favoring the revenues of capital to the detriment of those of labor. And indifference with regard to the ecological cost.

The constant repetition of this catechism, in all the media, by almost every politician, from the right as well as from the left, confers upon it such a force of intimidation that it chokes all attempts at free reflection, and makes resistance against this new obscurantism extremely difficult.

On this basis one would almost think that the 20 million European unemployed, the urban devastation, the general lack of security, burning slums, ecological turmoil, the return of racism and the tide of those who are left out are simply mirages, guilty hallucinations, seriously out of line with this best of all worlds that is building, for our anaesthetized consciousness, “la pensée unique.”

And that, because the new paradigms of the PPII system imperceptibly are structuring how we think of reality in this end of century. As a dominant ideology, they are liquid, they infiltrate every-

where, they intrude as though they were natural, and are taken up a d repeated again and again by the mass media (television, radio, press), by a great part of “the elites,” opinion-makers and partisans.

Also, it is shocking to note to what extent a period like ours, of boiling crises and dangers of all kinds, paradoxically coincides with a crushing ideological consensus imposed by the media, by surveys and publicity, thanks to the manipulation of signs and symbols, and to a new type of mind control.

Very fortunately, here and there, in the North as in the South, there are intellectuals, scientists and creative people who are quick to denounce the asphyxiating consensus, and to join in intellectual combat. They resist, dispute, rebel. They offer other arguments, other theses to escape the mind control and help to transform the world. They help us thus to understand better the meaning of our time. They express their refusal of a model of society based on economism, integral liberalism, totalitarianism of the markets and the tyranny of globalization. One is reminded of an old republican principle: citizens prefer disorder over injustice.

Especially as this new protest has created a crisis for the centers of power, for democracy and for the elites. Centers of power that increasingly seem to be the lieutenants, the back-up band, the lackeys of the true masters of the world: the financial markets. A democracy undermined by, among other things, the ease with which leaders who, having just been elected, drop their platform and their promises.

For years the elites have been striving to speak in praise of “politically correct thought,” exerting virtual blackmail on any critical appraisal, in the name of “modernization,” of “realism,” “responsibility” and “reason.” They affirm the “ineluctable” character

of the developments taking place, they preach intellectual capitulation and banish anyone who refuses to accept that “the natural state of society is the market” to the sidelines of the irrational.

In this respect, only roaring protests across European societies could put an end to one of the most reactionary periods of contemporary history; a period in which we lived to see, from 1983 to 1993, social democratic leaders and intellectuals give up any hope of transforming the world. They propose as a brilliant future only one solution, drawn from Darwinian terminology, so dear to the ultraliberals: adapt. That is, give up, abdicate, submit.

Even in the blackest part of the Great Depression of 1929, there were not such a great number of outcasts among the European population. There are 20 million unemployed alone, but when adding all sorts of other excluded, the number of people who are reduced to poverty is about 50 million, often adrift, localized in city outskirts and whose greatest fear is final marginalization. Ten million of them live below the absolute poverty line, with less than ^F60 per day. . . Because misery is an insult to human rights, such large scale shredding of the social fabric destroys a certain conception of the republic itself.

The unemployed, the homeless, those on the brink, and the rejects are dramatic expressions of the sacrifices demanded of European society for two decades without anything given in return. They are the social translation of purely ideological choices founded on principles of strict budgetary policy, of demands for the strengthening of currency, for the reduction of public deficits, relocation of businesses, competitiveness, productivity, etc. People do not want any more of that. And they do not accept calling something a reform when it is, strictly speaking, only a counter-reform, a return to the old social order, to the abominable world described by Dickens and Zola.

Million of citizens are affronted by the scandal of prosperous societies that, in the name of economism, tolerate pockets of misery that grow larger every day. How can we fail to understand the rancorous opposition to European integration among those who feel threatened by the brutality of the structural adjustment imposed by Brussels and the blind implementation of the criteria of convergence defined by the Treaty of Maastricht?

To build Europe is an essential objective at the hour when ultranationalism is on the prowl along its borders and within its own bosom. But one does not answer so noble a challenge with interest rates or criteria of convergence. It is the social arena that is the essential basis, the only thing that can give Europe credibility and hope again, and can release it from the monetarist gang which threatens to condemn it. Europe invented the Welfare state. As nowhere else in the world, the citizens of The Fifteen benefit from a regime including old age coverage, health insurance, family allowances, unemployment compensation, and various provisions of the labor law. This arsenal of socio-economic guarantees won by the labor movement constitutes the heart of modern European civilization. It is this social program that fundamentally distinguishes the European Union from other geopolitical areas and in particular from its American and Japanese economic competitors.

The logic of globalization and planetary free trade pushes for aligning wages and the provisions of social protection with those, very much lower, of the concurrent countries of Asia-Pacific. Can European governments continue, in the name of economic effectiveness, and at the risk of breaking up national cohesion, to raze the social edifice?

The attention with which European employees followed the

announcement of the closing of the Renault factory in Vilvoorde (Belgium) in February 1997—which led to the first “Euro-strike”—shows how widely the anxiety is shared. Everywhere, unjust and unequally distributed measures are carried out in about the same terms and at an identical pace, under the pressure of the financial markets. Everywhere, the citizens are wondering on the ultimate purpose in building Europe on the ruins of the Welfare State, on social regression, scarce employment, lack of money, falling wages. They wonder where is progress in all that.

Chapter 5

The Rise of the Irrational

Ruined by the stock market cataclysm of October 1987, a “small shareholder” hanged himself a few days later in a park in Madrid. To explain his gesture, the desperate man left a letter in which he denounced “the abuses and the cannibalism of the stock brokers with regard to small investors.” He also recounted there how, after having decided to commit suicide, he had allowed himself one last delay and had chosen to submit himself, in a sense, to God’s judgement: “I had a revelation that God did exist and that, perhaps, my destiny was not to be a suicide.” He then devoted the rest of his fortune to buying lottery tickets and playing Lotto, “to see whether God would put his hand in and help me get out of this situation.” But the heavens remained hopelessly quiet, luck did not smile upon him and the man finally hanged himself.

Notable Catholics of an Italian city also decided, in November 1987, to turn to God to save the Stock Exchange and make the share

prices go up. They had the local priest celebrate a solemn mass in order to deal with the fall of prices.

How not to turn toward God when things are breaking down all around you, when the economic “sciences” themselves appear unable to make logical corrections to the furiously disordered states of the world economy—disordered states and distortions which the specialists themselves do not hesitate to qualify as *irrational*?

The current economic crisis, by its brutality, is causing panic and bewilderment in every corner. In societies that are dominated, in theory, by rationality, when that slips or is dislocated, the citizens are tempted to resort to pre-rationalist forms of thought. They turn to superstition, esotericism, and they accept belief in magic wands that can transform lead into gold, and frogs into princes.

More and more people, who feel threatened by a brutal and forced technological modernization, feel a rancorous anti-modernism. And it is on the record that the current economic rationality, scornful of mankind, supports the rise of social irrationalism.

Faced with so many incomprehensible upheavals and so many threats, many people believe they are witnessing an eclipse of reason. They are tempted to escape to an irrational worldview. Many people turn toward the artificial paradise of drugs and alcohol or toward the parasciences and the occult. Is it common knowledge that in Europe, each year, more than 40 million people consult seers and healers, that one out of two people claims to be sensitive to paranormal phenomena.

Visionary cults, similar to the Davidians of Waco, Texas, Solar Temple, and Heaven’s Gate are multiplying, as well as many movements that count more than 300,000 followers in Europe.

Michel Foucault, in his class at the College of France, had a

habit of saying that truth, contrary to popular belief, is neither absolute, nor stable, nor univocal. "Truth has a history," he affirmed, "which, in the West, is divided into two periods: the age of Truth as Lightning and that of Truth as Heaven." Truth as Lightning is that which is revealed on a precise date, at a given place and by a person elected by the Gods like, for example, the Oracle of Delphi, the biblical prophets or, even today, the catholic pope speaking *ex cathedra*. Truth as Heaven, on the other hand, is established for all, always and everywhere; it is that of science, Copernicus, Newton and Einstein.

The first age lasted for millennia; and the passion of the revealed truth gave rise to leagues of zealots, plagues of heretical sects, and tireless builders of inquisitions. The second age, that of truth based on scientific reason, begins in a manner of speaking in the 18th century but also has its "great priests;" and Michel Foucault did not exclude the possibility that one day they might defend their own vision, and their prerogatives, with arguments not very different from those current in the Dark Ages.

This was confirmed in any case on the occasion of the Appeal of Heidelberg,¹ signed by 264 scientists including 52 Nobel Prize winners, denouncing ecology as "the emergence of an irrational ideology, which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress." The "Appeal" was made public at the time of the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in June 1993, at the moment when so many people were wondering precisely whether mankind was not "in danger from science."

This questioning is all the more relevant since, under the pretext of "industrial progress," ecological catastrophes are following one after another all across the planet in recent years, such as Three

Mile Island (200,000 people evacuated), Seveso (37,000 people contaminated), Bhopal (2,800 dead, 20,000 wounded), Chernobyl (300 dead, 50,000 exposed to nuclear radiation), Guadalajara (200 dead, 20,000 homeless), epidemics caused by contaminated blood, by the growth hormone, by asbestos, by “mad cow disease,” by tobacco, by diesel fuel . . .

These are cataclysms of a new type, and so are the many others on record—there have been, for example, in these last twenty years, approximately one thousand oil spills, and more than 180 serious chemical accidents which killed some 8,000 people and wounded more than 25,000. They contributed to dashing the hopes of those who expected modern science to bring humanity into a new golden age. The Appeal of Heidelberg, in which some felt they discerned “the premises of a new scientism,” does not change anything and does not dissipate the suspicion and mistrust accorded to technoscience.

In fact, many citizens consider that the alliance of capital, industry and science constitutes ethical treason on the part of science, and that such a commercial conception of progress is the principal cause of some of the most serious woes of the planet. Apathetic compromises and dull recommendations will only delay the inescapable deadlines and the hour of reckoning while the planet drifts toward a global ecological catastrophe. For people continue to witness, with rage in their hearts, the disappearance of the forests, the devastation of pastures, the erosion of the lands, advancing deserts, the disappearance of fresh water, the pollution of the oceans, overpopulation, spreading epidemics and poverty.

More and more people are convinced that science can no longer do anything either for the planet or for them and that progress, when it is controlled only by commercial interest, is “the mother of all

crises.”

At the time of previous economic crises, in highly industrialized countries, one could see massive movements of reversion to the irrational. The Old Continent thus knew, at the time of the Great Depression in the early Thirties, a moment when antiquated myths re-appeared with an essentially instinctive and emotional dynamism. The bankruptcy of modernism, the economic crisis, social distress and search for identity caused at that time a kind of disenchantment with the world and supported, in Germany in particular, a fascination with the irrational on which the extreme Right was able to capitalize. “Many German citizens,” according to the historian Peter Reichel, “wanted to distance themselves from a present that they did not understand, and preferred to be engulfed in a universe of illusion.”

In the Germany of the Twenties, military defeat followed by hyperinflation and bankruptcy caused a strong passion for occultist practices, the supernatural and the marvelous. This is borne out by the great popular success of expressionist films like *the Office of Doctor Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *the Golem*, *Mabuse*, *M*, *The Damned* and *Metropolis*. By analyzing these “demonic images,” the historian Sigfried Kracauer showed how direct was the path from Caligari to Hitler.²

In 1930, the writer Thomas Mann warned, in his famous novella *Mario and the Magician*, against the political dangers at a time of cultural misery, while all around him escapist ideologies multiplied, cults and parapsychology practices; and rationality faded away. His “magician,” a hypnotist, is a clear allusion to Benito Mussolini.

Traumatized by the complexity of the crisis, impoverished, upset, the Germans gave up their will, their free choice, their confidence in rational processes and, little by little, let themselves be taken

over by obscurantism and leader worship. "The masses started to think that the major calamities which overwhelmed them would not be resolved through logical reality-based reasoning, but through means like those of magic; that is how true it is that it is more comfortable and less painful to dream than to think."³ "The ground was prepared," Thomas Mann would say, "for faith in Hitler."

In the United States, the panic created by the stock market crash of 1929 (which began on October 23 and lasted until November 13) and by the terrible depression that it brought about would also support a growing belief in the irrational. There again, the cinema seems to be the best witness of this disconcerting public taste. Hollywood took the opportunity to launch a series of fantasy and terror films, which were extraordinary popular successes. The nightmarish characters of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *the Mummy*, *King Kong*, *Dr. Moreau's Island*, would exorcise the crisis victims' fears. The amazement of the cinema (it was the beginning of talking movies) dissipated and transformed the anguish of a poor everyday life, as Woody Allen masterfully illustrated in *the Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985).

The early Thirties, in America, was a time of pseudo-religious charlatans like Elmer Gantry, the hero of the Sinclair Lewis' novel. It was also the time of a strange flowering of games, lotteries of all kinds, of horoscopes (they appeared for the first time in the French press in 1935) and of absurd contests such as "dance marathons" which Horace MacCoy would denounce in his novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935).

Unemployment, plummeting wages, innumerable business failures, ruinous bankruptcies, crisis and depression fell with extraordinary violence on confident, carefree American citizens. To their greater consternation, they would witness the incredible incompetence

of their political leaders and their inability to face the economic storm and overcome the dangers. The President of the United States, Herbert Hoover, himself an ultra-liberal, initially admitted in 1930, "I never believed that our form of government could solve economic problems satisfactorily by direct action, nor that it could successfully manage economic institutions." And especially, the Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, who did not hesitate to shout in the face of fourteen million unemployed, "Long live the crisis!" He added, "It will purge the rot which infects the system. The too high cost of living and the overblown standard of living will drop. People will work harder; they will live a more moral life. Stock exchange prices will find a level of adjustment, and enterprising people will collect the debris given up by the less competent."

Faced with these statements, which any victim of crisis and mass unemployment perceives as cynical, doubt settled upon many people as well as skepticism and mistrust with regard to the political community. In such circumstances the most established principles waver and threaten to collapse. Unparliamentary, undemocratic proposals, which at one time would have been rejected with one's last ounce of strength, then found many attentive ears.

In the years 1971-1973, at the end of a thirty year period of growth and prosperity, the return of the specter of unemployment and recession made for a come-back, in the field of the socio-cultural imagination, of new fictions about crisis such as, for example, catastrophe films⁴: *Earthquake*, *Airport*, *Towering Inferno*, *the Poseidon Adventure*, etc. These movie stories announced, fairly accurately, industrial society's entry into a new era of social anguish.

During the last twenty-five years, as the economic situation deteriorated and the number of misfits increased, modern sects multi-

plied as well as new superstitions. It was as if, in the slow evolution of people's thought patterns, between the ground won by technical rationality and that lost by the traditional religions, there remained a kind of no man's land to be occupied by new beliefs or antiquated religious forms.

The new poverty and the confused anguish that the economic deterioration causes explain, for example, the extraordinary rebirth of pilgrimages in Europe. And, as at the worse times of popular despair, some of the faithful even believe they see, again, appearances of the Virgin Mary. In April 1982, at La Talaudière (Indre), a teenager swore having seen the Virgin Mary. Very quickly, as though completely desperate, thousands of pilgrims and disabled persons flocked in from all over the country, and also from Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy. They gathered in the garden where the appearance had taken place and awaited a sign from heaven . . .

In September 1984, Mary reappeared at Montpinchon (Normandy), where three witnesses believe to see her "radiant, with fair hair and arms extended." There again, thousands of disabled people arrived very quickly in the hope of a new manifestation. If it does not occur, they will go on a pilgrimage like 300,000 others each year to Kerinizen (Finistère) where there lives to this day an elderly visionary, Jeanne-Louise. Over thirty years, the Virgin is supposed to have appeared to her seventy-one times and said: "I want to re-Christianize France so that it becomes again a light to the heathens . . . Other pilgrims (a million and half on average a year) go to 140 rue du Bac in Paris, to the vault of "the miraculous medallion." This is a medallion that the Virgin is supposed to have asked to be struck, during an appearance on November 27, 1830, "to grant great graces." Bernadette Soubirous was wearing it around her neck in 1858 when

she saw the Virgin at Lourdes, at the entrance to a cave where more than four million pilgrims come to pray every year. . .

This rebirth of popular religion, the worship of healing saints, encouraged by the most conservative hierarchy of the Church, coincides clearly with the return of hard times. In such times, one rediscovers hope in providence and, literally, belief in miracles.

But belief is even stronger in the old pagan myths of destiny, of luck; and, three thousand years after the Chaldeans, people call upon the power of the stars “which regulate, by an inflexible will, everything in the universe.” While knowing these beliefs to be incompatible with the scientific spirit, people, intimidated by the risks of the new era, stand by their perfectly illogical reasoning and superstitious formulas. They thus defy, without acknowledging it, the criteria of a technologico-scientific rationality which does not always correspond to their immediate obsessions (unemployment, AIDS, contaminated blood, “mad cows,” cancer, loneliness, insecurity, etc). Having held up as their banner the slogan, “may the best one win,” everyone seeks to prove, beyond his objective social contingencies, that he can be a winner, a fighter of the neoliberal sort—even if only through games of chance.

Luck thus takes on a hallowed position. It is at the same time attractive and terrifying. Around us all kinds of lotteries are proliferating. . . And we see the absolutely delirious explosion of games and contests offered by so many stores, product brands, publications and newspapers. Not to mention the many television shows which, under the amazed eyes of such a vast number of losers, turn a strange wheel of fortune that rains millions on the happy winners. . .

The spectacle of sports, too, in these times of neo-obscurantism, becomes again “an opium of the people.” It allows pent

up, internalized aggressions to unwind; it is offered as a kind of substitute for war; although under a different guise, certainly, it is the metaphor of war, confrontation, violence.

The media-zation of sports supports its politicization. We saw how Italian fascism exploited soccer politically. In the Twenties, great stadiums were built in Italy, a World Soccer Championship was organized, a program of matches was scheduled, and the national team's victories were exploited to the maximum. The national team was introduced as though they were an authentic substitute for the nation itself, incarnating its principal qualities. Thus Mussolini integrated the organization of sports events into a political method that was reprised very soon thereafter by Hitler and the Nazis, culminating in the organization of the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. They were, let us not forget, the first televised Games. Another example is that of the communist states and the excessive political importance these regimes attached to sports victories, in particular in international competitions. Sports and the political manipulation of the masses are, in the 20th century, closely linked.

It has been observed that there are groups on the extreme right that glorify certain football teams—because the football teams are, to some extent, as they were for Mussolini, the incarnation of the principal values of their community. Some fans even tattoo the national colors on their faces. They “incorporate,” they register the team's colors on their bodies. And, during troubled times like those in which we live, all these attitudes which may appear rather folkloric in ordinary times can lead to xenophobia or the rejection of those whom one would describe as “weak” because they do not belong to the group that was forceful enough to win.

The first gesture of a champion nowadays, as soon as he

crosses the finish line, consists of dashing toward his national flag and draping himself with it. That has become a ritual, a standard. There is no champion any longer who doesn't run toward the flag and run a lap of honor wrapped in the national colors.

The association of television, sports and nationalism combines the three principal contemporary mass phenomena, three central fascinations of this end of century. That, in itself, constitutes one of the major political facts of our time, and an irrational component of the socially hardened times.

The irrational is also making headway in terms of policy. Haven't we seen, during recent elections in the United Kingdom and in France, the appearance of a "Party of Natural Law" proposing in all seriousness, in order to get out of the crisis, "to develop transcendental meditation" and to encourage "yogic flight"? The former Minister of Culture, the Socialist Jack Lang, even had a national Center of Magical Arts and Illusion built in Blois, the city of which he is mayor.

Only money brings happiness, we have heard repeated all these last years, in the era of "King Money" and triumphant neoliberalism, when the only worthy goal in life was to get rich. The ordinary citizen had no other chance of attaining paradise on earth but by winning one of the many magical lotteries.

But to win, you have to have luck—which is, astrologically speaking, a matter of being born under a lucky star. The uncertainty of the future and the frenzy of the games have thus led the hordes of people trying to get rich to turn to the new generation of magicians, fortune-tellers and clairvoyants. By telephone, over the Internet or simply in front of television cameras, they predict the future, suggest winning numbers and lucky colors. . .

More than twenty thousand modern wizards, fortune-tellers,

astrologers and other official haruspices, with the assistance of a few dozen dervishes from Africa, are hardly enough, to meet the anguished demand of some four million regular customers in France. Esotericism is in full expansion; half the French populace consult their horoscope regularly, and the print runs of astrology magazines continue to go up (two of them are over a hundred thousand copies).

The boom of this industry of divination (tarot cards, talismans, chiromancy, healers, dowsing) corresponds to a major decline of the individual. People end up thinking that their "birth sky" can determine, absolutely, their biographies. Thus, in these superstitious times, "astral destiny" as interpreted by the fortune-teller is replacing the reading of the ways of God that at one time were conducted by the priest.

Obscurantism increasingly seduces certain minds turned off by the complexity of the new technological realities, shocked by the irrational economic horror, which favors the obscurantism already flourishing throughout the world in the form of "conservative revolutions" and various fundamentalist movements: Islamist in Iran, puritanical in the United States, ultra-orthodox in Israel, etc.

But tomorrow, when the crisis will have amplified fears still further, it could unchain more serious destructive impulses. And as the troubles mount, it will be tempting to look for convenient scapegoats.

Some politicians are already designating them. "Like the Romans, we are liable to be invaded by barbaric people like the Arabs, the Morrocans, the Yugoslavians and the Turks," stated a former Belgian Minister of the Interior, Joseph Michel, "people who come from far away and have nothing in common with our civilization." Senile ideas can thus reappear in younger bodies and become popularized.

In the Thirties, the novelist Thomas Mann had had a presentiment of this danger. "The irrationality that is becoming popular is a dreadful spectacle. I feel that a fatal misfortune will result from it." In the current climate of cultural pessimism and a resurgence of fundamental national and social questions, in Europe, the forces of the extreme right are drifting. They are the result of disappointments of all kinds, brought on by a disembodied liberalism. Here and there, in Western Europe in particular, a kind of quiet xenophobia is setting in and a thousand (bad) arguments seek to justify it.

Lack of reasoning nourishes ignorance and credulity, myths and passions, faith and fears. They are the foods of religion, of superstition. And the economic traumatism that European societies are currently undergoing is likely to transform these foods into elixirs, for a new cruelty.

Nazism had its roots in a Germany under distress; it was able to benefit from the impact of the economic depression, from the convulsive shift of capitalism and national trauma. This is the explosive mix with which Europe is again confronted. Will people be able to mobilize themselves to prevent the repetition of that ominous precedent?

Notes

1. *Le Monde*, June 3, 1992.
2. Sigfried Kracauer, *De Caligari à Hitler*, Paris, Flammarion, 1987.
3. Andre Gisselbrecht in his introduction to *Mario et le Magician*, Paris, Flammarion, 1983.
4. Cf. Ignacio Ramonet, *Le Chewing-gum des yeux*, Paris, Alain Moreau, 1981.

Chapter 6

The Dawn of the Tribes

To explain what kind of world we are entering since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the American professor Samuel Huntington declared, in a resounding article published in 1993, “My assumption is that, in the new world, conflicts will not stem primarily from ideology or the economy. The great causes of division of humanity and the principal sources of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will continue to play the primary role in international affairs, but the principal world political conflicts will set against each other nations and groups belonging to different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate world politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the future front lines.”

He added, “The feeling of being a member of one civilization will take on more and more importance in the future, and the world on the whole will be shaped by the interactions of seven or eight major

civilizations: specifically, the Western civilization, Confucianism, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic Orthodox, Latin American and, perhaps, African. The greatest conflicts to come will take place along the cultural fault lines which separate these civilizations.”

Immediately, this theory gave rise to a fantastic global polemic, as virulent as that caused by the essayist Francis Fukuyama with his famous idea of the “end of history.” In the aggregate, the refutations won out, and many authors—while noting that the majority of recent conflicts (Congo, Rwanda, Liberia, Bosnia, Chechnya, the Middle East, Algeria, the southern Sudan, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Chiapas) have an important cultural dimension—reproached Samuel Huntington for his political simplifications, his crude demarcation of the boundaries of civilizations and, especially, his clarion call for the West to resist an alleged Islamic and Confucian offensive.

These theses indisputably encouraged ambient xenophobia in the United States and in several European countries; they gave credit to the idea that Islam, in particular, was the new “total enemy” of the West. This was proven when, after the abominable attack in Oklahoma, April 19, 1995, the American media (and the European) immediately suggested “an Islamic group” as “the most probable author” of the infamy. Then it was discovered that the monsters belonged to the American extreme right, white and Christian . . .

One may reproach Huntington for talking about “the bloody frontiers of Islam” when he could just as easily refer to the “bloody frontiers of Orthodox and Catholic Christendom” in the Balkans or the Caucasus, or the “bloody frontiers of Hinduism” in Kashmir and Sri Lanka, or the “bloody frontiers of the interests of the great European and American States” on the borders between the North and the South.

Can the contemporary world and its history be divided among

a few great coherent civilizations, with clearly identifiable contours? Aren't such globalizing concepts founded on the assumption of "pure subjects," largely mythical and mystifying? Can one fail to appreciate the interpenetrating of cultures? Can one underestimate the effects of mixing, interbreeding and, in the final analysis, the modernization which colonization has entailed?

Human religious and cultural formations are permeable. The history of humanity is the account of exchanges of all kinds among human beings. Islam is shaped by ancient Jewish and Christian sources. In India, there are Moslem sanctuaries that are visited predominantly by Hindus, and in northern Africa, tombs of Jewish saints that are visited mostly by Moslem pilgrims.

These ambiguities multiply and intensify nowadays because of the planet-wide distribution of the Western urban model, the universal adoption of the same structural organization of the State and, especially, the fantastic power of the new mass media which diffuse identical patterns of behavior, consumption and entertainment, and which spread the same imaginary concept, that of world culture.

So much so that, in reference to Huntington's theses, some agree that there is but one "single civilization" any more—that of capitalism—and that the next conflicts will be to some extent a new kind of civil war. Within the same universal civilization, there will be no more war between the nations, nor war between civilizations, but if the inequalities continue to increase we will witness more and more violent confrontations between the haves and the have-nots, the outcasts and the "new Masters of the Universe."

No one can feel safe within a coherent identity any more, sheltered from new and diverse cultural forms. This coexistence can sometimes seem painful. It remains necessary and enriching, even if

only to avoid the harmful temptation toward ethnic, cultural and religious purity.

It is this temptation which lay at the origin of the wars in Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1996. And those who doubted saw, to their dismay, the Yugoslav paradigm for four years—proof that cruelty still survives in the middle of modern civilization, in the heart of Europe. Inhumanity, cruelty, the ferocity of the combat between opposing Serbs, Croats and Bosnians is dismaying and revolting. Why such a dirty war? For identity? For the past? But these three peoples have so many common features—all are Slavic, they speak the same language—that they sought for centuries, while fighting against their external enemies, to link themselves and form one nation, that of the southern Slavs. . .

Yugoslavia means: “country of the Southern Slavs.” Before 1918, two thirds of them were subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Some, the Slovenes, were under Austrian administration; others, the Croats, were under Hungarian administration; independent Yugoslavians (among them many Moslems) were divided between the Kingdom of Montenegro and that of Serbia.

Slovenes and Croats are Catholic and use the Latin alphabet; the Serbs, who are Orthodox, write in Cyrillic characters; others, finally, are Moslem, write essentially in Cyrillic characters, and did not become a nationality apart (the Moslems) until the time of Tito. . . In spite of these differences, a powerful desire for unification had been manifest for a long time, since the three quarters of these populations speak only one and the same language: Serbo-Croatian.

This is why, after the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918, the momentum to create a national state led to the Yugoslav unification and the proclamation of a kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on

December 1st, 1918.

Are the exaltation of common origins, of identity, the mythicization of history and the sharing of similar values enough to forge a nation; to create, at the citizen's level, the new feeling of belonging to a common fatherland? As much as the differences were minimized during the march toward unification, so, unification scarcely having been attained, they constituted the leaven of quarrels which tragically poisoned the life of this Yugoslav state. Nationalism had cemented the country, nationalisms broke it apart.

Historically, modern nationalism appeared in the 19th century in Germany, in opposition to the universalistic plan of the French Revolution. To counter the prospect of a uniform world governed by the abstract ideas of rationalism, the nationalists offered specific characteristics: land, language, religion, blood. Each time the Utopia of a universal and perfect society threatens, nationalism re-appears with a vengeance. Internationalist Communism was one of these Utopias, as that of the borderless market and economic universalism is today, imposing the same output norms and the same lifestyle everywhere.

Is it acceptable, even against such Utopias, to turn to nationalism? Doesn't nationalism itself constitute a regressive Utopia? Has a community, because it speaks the same language, magically abolished all the tensions and all the conflicts in its bosom?

The President of Croatia, first, issued the idea of dismembering Bosnia-Herzegovina (40% of the population is Moslem) in order to enlarge the territory of his republic with the areas populated by Croats. The Bosnian President responded by going to Turkey, Libya and Iran, to seek "political support."

The result: as of April 6, 1992, Sarajevo was being bombed,

and would know four years of destruction, suffering, death. . . This city, where three communities—Croatian, Moslems and Serbs—had coexisted harmoniously for hundreds of years, became the symbol of intolerance and racist madness. The lessons of the Second World War and the Trials of Nuremberg, the judgment of the crimes against humanity and the wars of conquest, waged on behalf of racial theories, were forgotten.

The international community finally resigned itself, by means of the Dayton Accords which preserve the form of unity but slice it along the “ethnic division” of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It permitted a weakening of reason and the political spirit, and established a disastrous precedent which will undoubtedly be called upon in other European powder kegs: Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, the Voivodina, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, Transdnistria, the Crimea, the Baltic States, the Caucasus. . . whose explosion could set ablaze the entire Old Continent.

And now we see the incompetence of those who encouraged the hasty dislocation of the Yugoslav Federation. By recognizing the independence of Slovenia and Croatia as of December 23, 1991, Bonn, the Vatican and the European Union acted with a tragic precipitousness. They underestimated the minorities’ problem and that of the internal borders. They thus encouraged the rise of ultra-nationalist forces that were dreaming everywhere of ethnically “homogeneous” states.

No one was ignorant of the large Serb minority’s savage hostility (33% of the population in Bosnia) to the creation of an independent state dominated by the Moslems (42% of the population) whose leader, Alija Izetbegovic, is the author of a proclamation entitled *For an Islamic State*. . . That was all clear since the free

elections of 1990 in Bosnia had swept aside the lay and multi-ethnic moderate groups, and had revealed the power of the ultra-nationalist parties within the three principal communities.

The conflict in former Yugoslavia encompassed such injustices and such atrocities that non-intervention was a political crime, as it was during the war in Spain in 1936-1939, when besieged Madrid called for assistance from democratic countries to save the Republic attacked by Fascism. The UN humanitarian mission to Bosnia this time was a failure also; the American intervention in 1995 was guided by the desire to impose a political solution. They were satisfied to accept, in fact, the creation of a kind of Moslem "Bantustan."

Europe's dreadful impotence vis-a-vis the Yugoslav tragedy pointed up not only its political weakness but also its paralyzing contradictions: fears, in France (who was among the first to recognize Croatia's "vocation for independence"), of seeing Germany extend its sphere of influence; fear, in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Italy and Spain, of encouraging separatists and, by boomerang effect, the dislocation of their own national unity; fear also, at the hour when the European Union was being built and strengthened, of a general balkanization of the Old Continent. For Yugoslavia was only a kind of dramatic laboratory where one could measure the dangers that the end of the Cold War entailed.

Indeed, in their opposition to the communist regime and its economic inefficiency, citizens of the countries of the East and the former USSR were sunk by their democratic desire and their nationalist ambitions. These regimes fell but here and there (Albania, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia) the shortages remain and are even, for the most part, worsening. Leaving a tyrannical system to live worse off, does that make sense? The more so as the old system, certainly

absurd and anti-liberty, guaranteed nonetheless a certain material safety to everyone.

The new democratic regime seems to be a decoy, worse, an obstacle. Popular discontent thus finds in nationalism and the impassioned exaltation of the “identifying virtues” an easy means of distraction and mobilization. It finds in the “other”—the foreigner, the immigrant—a ready scapegoat.

Only the satisfaction of these societies’ needs could temper this contest. But these needs are gigantic. By way of comparison, Germany, one of most powerful economies in the world, put its own economy and those of its European partners in difficulty by spending, in seven years, the astronomical sum of 1000 billion dollars to bail out the former GDR and its 18 million inhabitants. However, to the East, nearly 400 million people await this same level of assistance. . . . And the West does not dare to acknowledge—having made such a fuss about its victory over communism—that it cannot shoulder the costs implied by this victory and launch a dozen new Marshall plans. . . . “The market is effective but it has neither brain nor heart,” notes Professor Paul Samuelson, Nobel laureate in economics.

Such political myopia can lead to a worse state. History teaches us that when a serious economic crisis coincides with the outburst of nationalist passions, the worst misfortunes are to be feared. Ignited by nationalism and the exaggerated promises of the populists, tomorrow Russia could, at its turn, flare up. President Boris Yeltsin found himself at the head of an old colonial metropolis; and every one of his decisions has stirred up or strengthened peripheral nationalism, as the tragic affair of Chechnya proved in 1995-1996, and as the Caucasus conflicts of 1991 to 1995 demonstrated earlier.

The conflicts in the Caucasus strongly resembled those that

enveloped the former Yugoslavia, both in the fanaticism that provoked them (ultra-nationalism, irredentism, and ethnic hatred), and in their violence and atrocities (hostage-taking, civil massacres, collective rapes).

For what enigmatic reasons did the Caucasus events attract less interest from the major media? Why did they spark so few outcries amid the chancelleries? The international authorities themselves—the UN, NATO, UEO, CSCE—hardly condescended to look into the situation.

Four wars have taken place recently in the Caucasus. The oldest set the Armenians and Azeris in conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. The province is populated by Armenians but attached to Azerbaijan, which had forcefully opposed, unsuccessfully to up until now, the area's secession and its annexation by Erevan.

Another conflict, similar in nature, set Georgia against the small Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia (100,000 inhabitants) which wished to break with Tbilisi and form one entity with North Ossetia, within the framework of the Federation of Russia.

North Ossetia was itself at war against its Ingush minority. Deported by Stalin in 1945, the Ingush have been trying since the end of the Fifties to recover their ancestral grounds and in particular the town of Vladikavkaz, which has become the Ossetian capital . . .

The fourth war was held in Abkhazia, an Autonomous Republic located in western Georgia, on the edge of the Black Sea. Abkhazia unilaterally proclaimed its independence in July 1992 and since then has faced, victoriously, the Georgian militia's offensives.

In every camp, these wars gave place to unspeakable horrors. The disaster of "ethnic cleansing" was repeated, as well as systematic torture and mass slaughters. Civilians were, again, the principal

victims; thousands have been killed, and over a million refugees are piling up in cities lacking all necessities—heat, electricity, food . . .

These conflicts reflect the chaos that rules in the process of decolonizing the Soviet empire. Can this immense, disintegrating country afford to waste time in obsolete quarrels? The economic teams that succeed to power, one after another, around Boris Yeltsin, have implemented “shock therapies” to accelerate the transition toward a market economy. One fossilized dogma has been replaced by another: that of structural adjustment as preached by the heralds of ultra-liberalism. Prices have gone up brutally, the factories and offices are “taking the fat out” of payrolls. In a country where everyday life was already hell, the numbers of the poor, the have-nots, and the unemployed have exploded.

All the ingredients are thus joined together for disorder to proliferate in Russia. The West feared Soviet power. It has discovered, with alarm, that is even more afraid of its implosion, its collapse. Will it be necessary, on behalf of the “economic imperative,” to lock liberty in a sarcophagus again?

To give serious aide to Russia and Balkan Europe seems to be out of the question, the more so as the disgruntlement of the middle class also extends within the European Union. Here too, extremism and racism are developing. Against a backdrop of widespread disillusionment, European citizens feel they are slipping toward an inhuman world. From the heart of darkness, obscure forces are re-appearing, which threaten democracy.

In a Europe in the midst of a social and moral crisis, haunted by economic fears, and where the political community seems to have lost touch with public opinion, distress wins hearts easily. The legitimate fear for tomorrow, with unemployment affecting masses of

people, supports the rise of xenophobia and racism.

This was confirmed in February 1997, when the French government, under pretext of fighting clandestine immigration, boldly proposed the draft of a xenophobic law. The draft was protested by some parts of society and, in particular, by many creative professionals and intellectuals.

Like no one other state of the European Union (except for Austria), France has known fifteen years of strong pressure from the extreme right, represented by the Front National which, in the June 1997 legislative elections, were in a decisive position in some 200 districts. . . This party and particularly its chief, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in a flourish of demagoguery, designated immigrant workers as the principal cause of the difficulties of the French. With minimal restraint of language, they excite ambient racism and particularly denounce the presence of Arabs and Africans, whom they officially promise, in their program, to expel en masse when they come into power.

Bound up in politically correct thinking, snared by globalization and ultra-liberal totalitarianism, disabled by a social disaster in which 5 million people currently are deprived of employment, the parties on the left and right, which followed one another into the executive office in Paris, since 1981, have failed to stop the rise of extremism. Left and right, unable to distinguish themselves clearly in the economic field, have preferred to clash on questions of society, in particular on this affair of immigration, playing the neofascists' game. Thus, under the pretext of fighting against clandestine labor, the Socialist Party disavowed its promise and refused to grant voting rights in the local elections to foreigners, while the right strengthened the already Draconian legislation that controls entry and visiting visas

for foreigners.

Little by little, from one overblown promise to the next, from the extreme right, and in all good conscience, a quasi-fascistic atmosphere of tracking foreigners arose. The Méhaignerie-Pasqua laws, in 1993, contributed scandalously to this blanket suspicion on all foreigners.

Immigration is not the central concern of the French, who are tormented, above all, by unemployment. All the surveys prove it. And France is far from holding the world record in accepting workers from abroad. States like Germany, for example, have considerably more unemployment (7.6% of its population), not to mention those countries that proudly define themselves as “nations of immigrants”: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand . . .

Since the end of the 18th century, France, unlike all the other European states, has been a country of immigration, for reasons that are certainly demographic but equally political. It is the only state in Europe that has a nonreligious and republican (nonethnic) concept of the nation. It conveys a universalist message of freedom and the defense of human rights. Historically it has constituted a refuge, a harbor, an asylum for all the persecuted democrats. Over many decades, that has been its greatness: France has accommodated and integrated hundreds of thousands of Italians, Belgians, Poles, Armenians, Spaniards, Central European Jews, Russians, Portuguese, Algerians, Vietnamese, etc. And it continues to do so today (with all due respect to those who take up the archaic argument of “inassimilable foreigners”) as effectively as before—to such an extent that it counts more than 18 million citizens having at least one foreign grandparent, that is to say close to one Frenchman in three!

In an old epic by Anthony Mann, *the Fall of the Roman*

Empire (1964), the emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius stands, around the year 180, at the border of his immense empire's new territories, before a victory parade of his legions. They are primarily made up of mercenaries: Scythians, Parthians, Germans, Iberians, Picts, Numidians, Galls, etc., who, in their traditional costumes, pass before him and salute him. . . in their own languages. Marcus Aurelius, stoical, understands the vanity of the plan to homogenize, standardize, Latinize all the peoples of the empire at once. The fall of Rome consequently appears to him inevitable, each of these peoples will divide the spoils . . .

Watching on television the procession of national delegations during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Atlanta, in July 1996, how can one miss the similarity to that symbolic sequence in Mann's film? And how can one fail to think of the rebirth of nationalist, separatist passions, that sports paradoxically seems to stimulate? Since 1789, nationalism has been the most powerful political sentiment in Europe. It is a contradictory feeling which, in its romantic aspect, can be very moving and must win the approbation of all who exalt the liberation of peoples; but it also has a disastrous side which can quickly take over and lead to blind exaltation of "national values," to mistrust and exclusion of the Other. Those nice little countries, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, for example, hardly having obtained their independence, experienced dictatorships in the Twenties which, in the name of nationalism, treated their many minorities with hatred, attacking them and regarding them as true enemies. . . It is equally true, as Karl Popper says, that "The more one tries to return to the heroic era of the tribal community, the more one falls into the Inquisition, the secret police and gangsterism behind a romantic mask."

Behind the nationalist speeches, one often hears spring up the dream of an “ethnically pure” country. An absurd dream for, as the British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm states: “There aren’t more than one dozen linguistically and ethnically homogeneous states among the some 170 states in the world, and probably none which encompasses the totality of the ‘nation’ which it proclaims.” But how to avoid this dangerous and illusory quest?

Does a democracy have the means to prevent one fraction of its territory, asserting its ethnocultural singularity, from aspiring to full sovereignty and claiming its independence? Confronted with Slovakia’s desire to secede, Vaclav Havel, the former President of Czechoslovakia, decided that it does not. And resigning on July 20, 1992, he acknowledged: “I do not want to be a barrier to the evolution of history. The pressures for the emancipation of Slovak society turned out to be stronger than we, the federalists, thought; and I must respect them.”

The same type of situation could happen in Canada. In this respect, Quebec is a case in point, which certain areas of the European Union observe with great interest, because, within a democratic framework and in a peaceful way, it has been raising, over the course of several decades, the question of its sovereignty, its independence—in short, of its separation from Canada. But now it is doing so in a geopolitical context indisputably altered by the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) linking Canada, the United States and Mexico.

However, any such integration plan supposes the adoption of common rules that diminish in one way or another, particularly in the economic field, the sovereignty of the States. With the distancing of the centers of decision-making, the States—at one time a unifying

force—see their national cohesion unraveling, stretching, and sometimes breaking up. This is especially true where some of these fragments have distinct cultural features (language, especially). It is as if the force of the fusion causes multiple fissions.

In addition, Quebec's aspiration now coincides with the major phenomenon of globalization. The latter, by encouraging deregulation, has also constrained the States to give up whole aspects of their sovereignty, striped governments of important prerogatives and is tending to impose identical economic behaviors everywhere, without taking account of the local cultural singularities. In such a context, how does one raise the national question?

After the October 30, 1995 referendum and the narrow defeat of the partisans of Quebec's independence (49.4% of the votes), this question is extremely topical. Certainly Lucien Bouchard, Prime Minister since January 29, 1996, has pointed out that sovereignty remains the objective of the Party Québécois (in power since 1994) but that the law forbids him to organize a second referendum on the same subject during the same mandate. Therefore, they will have to wait until 1999, at the earliest, if the Party Québécois wins the legislative elections once more, for the citizens to make their call again. As of now, the surveys indicate that a majority of them (55%) are in favor of independence, and that this is *unequivocal* for 75% of Québécois.

In Ottawa, the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, seems to have decided to revise the federalist structure in a way that is more favorable to the aspirations of Quebec, and in a direction that recognizes finally, in particular, the *distinct* character of Quebec's society. But other federalists are behaving like "sore winners" and—on behalf of the principle: "If Canada is divisible, Quebec is also"—are quick to refer to a "partition" of the *Belle Province*. In order to preserve the

rights of English-speakers in Quebec to remain tied to Canada, they propose to grant independence only to the districts where the “yes” vote wins.

They also encourage the autochthon populations (Inuit and Indo-Americans) to claim their own independence with regard to Quebec in order to reduce it to “a small area shaped like a string of sausages, consisting principally of farms between the east side of Montreal and the city of Quebec.”

Such ideas are irresponsible and, everywhere that they have been implemented, from Northern Ireland to the Caucasus, have caused interminable wars. What is more, how can Canada apply to Quebec a principle of partition that it officially and militarily condemned in former Yugoslavia? The Serb President, Milosevic, encouraged the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina precisely on the principle that “If Yugoslavia is divisible, Bosnia is too”?

As it turned out, the October 30, 1995 referendum did not settle anything. The institutional future of the *Belle Province* remains uncertain. To deal with this crisis, Lucien Bouchard organized a conference on the economic and social future of Quebec. This led, in fact, to true a *aggiornamento* of the Party Québécois which, in its turn, forsook the social democratic plan to adopt the neoliberal way. The absolute priority is the end of the public deficit and the reduction of the debt.

Will that affect the nationalist plan? Less than one may think, for this plan, at the hour of globalization, has as much to do with separation as with integration—rather than separate from Canada, better, as a sovereign nation, to join in an economic partnership extended preferentially to the United States and Mexico.

In Europe likewise, nationalists who dream of independence

for Flanders, the Basque Country, Scotland and Corsica, by no means plan to withdraw from dependence on the European Union . . .

And the fact that an ethnic community is very small and has a less than extensive territory does not constitute a deterrent, either, to the call for independence. There are more than twenty States in the United Nations with fewer than 250,000 inhabitants . . .

In this reawakening of tribal urges, how can we make people understand—those, in Europe and elsewhere, who dream of “ethnically pure nation states”—that a flag and a seat at the United Nations will not help them to automatically solve their social and economic contradictions, and will not magically dissipate their instinctive fears, when globalization is in full swing at the end of the millennium.

Chapter 7

Rebellions to Come

Once the Cold War was over, people of the world thought they would soon benefit from the “peace dividend.” In fact it turned out to be no such thing. During the long sequence from 1945-1990, many conflicts (disputed borders, nationality questions, instances of irredentism, minorities) were on hold because of the pressures exerted by both superpowers: the United States and the USSR. But, with the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the thousand crises on standby suddenly, and almost simultaneously, exploded. “With the end of the Cold War,” notes Lester Thurow, professor of economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), “we returned to the situation which, in the final analysis, has dominated the majority of human history, that of a great fluidity of borders.”

The world became more complex and more dangerous even though in most areas (in Eastern Europe, the former USSR, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and even in sub-Saharan Africa), the demo-

cratic model was gaining ground. In this respect, it should be noted that an significant geocultural area—the Arab world—remained on the margins of this democratization movement because of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, and in spite of the results of the Gulf War.

Six years after the end of the Gulf War, none the great questions of the Middle East had begun to be answered. The quasi-apocalyptic destruction of Iraq, in February 1991, left that country prey to its neighbors' ambitions and plunged it into instability. Shortages of all kinds and social tragedies (child mortality, epidemics, famines), caused by the UN-mandated embargo, were added to the uprising of Kurdistan, and the insurrection—brutally choked—of the Shiites in the South. It was hell for the population; but the dictator of Baghdad stayed in power.

The Gulf War did not put an end to the chronic instability of the Near East. Autocracy continues in Saudi Arabia; democratization in Kuwait and in the emirates appears more chimerical than ever; radical Islam is deepening its roots and is well entrenched in Egypt, as in Jordan and Lebanon; and Syria's disengagement from this last country has been postponed. As for the Kurds, they will undoubtedly be sacrificed once again, on behalf of political realism, Ankara fearing the creation of an autonomous state on its eastern border (to the north of Iraq), which could become an example for the ten million Kurds of Turkey.

Finally, of the two major crises of 1991—the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union—Israel will be the principal beneficiary in this region. On the one hand, the defeat of Iraq and the embargo removed a formidable adversary. In addition, the implosion of the USSR accelerated the arrival of ex-Soviet immigrants, and strengthened the population policy needed to allow to Israel to win the

demographic battle.

This double victory was so clear that it reinforced the intransigence of the various Israeli governments that have followed one another since 1991. The Prime Minister at that time, Itzhak Shamir, no longer admitting the existence of an unspecified “green line” separating Israel from the West Bank, stated at that time that: “The territories belong to Israel. Jews will be established everywhere on our land until the end of the horizon.” Within his party, the Likud (the right), “hawks” like Ariel Sharon proclaimed an even more hard-line policy.

Israeli extremists have always been sorely tempted to undertake a massive expulsion of the Palestinians; and, within the Shamir government, the parties of the extreme right were inclined indeed toward a radical solution: to remove the Palestinian community en masse, to eradicate all traces of their presence on the territory of “Greater Israel” . . .

However, events in the East came as a reminder, between 1989 and 1996, that one cannot “erase” a people. Massive violence and deportations did not dent the desire for independence, for example, of the Chechens. Isn’t Israel the best example of a “people” dispersed by force, whose Temple was razed and who, nineteen centuries later, seek to gather together again in the lost homeland? Shouldn’t this tragic experience lead Tel Aviv to a more lucid appreciation of the lessons of history?

Of all the ethnic wars that bloody the planet, that between the Israelis and the Palestinians is undoubtedly the oldest. “A conflict going back more than one hundred years,” acknowledged Itzhak Rabin. Elected in June 1992, he had promised to accelerate the peace negotiations begun in Madrid on October 30, 1991.

The ersatz autonomy which he proposed to the Palestinians via the Oslo agreements appears so minimal that the concessions authorized by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led to its being discredited in the eyes of that part of the population tempted by radicalism Islam.

In spite of the famous handshake between Itzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in Washington, September 13, 1993, mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestinians, and the signing of the Oslo Agreements, the intransigence of the Israeli government, overall, did not weaken.

Before being assassinated in 1996 by a Jewish extremist, Itzhak Rabin continued to support the installation of colonists in the occupied territories. There are currently more than 120,000 such settlers.

And, in contempt of the United Nations Resolutions and of Washington's recommendations, the current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated that the number of Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem and in the Israeli settlements on the West Bank would be doubled, and that the Palestinian state—whose right to existence has been confirmed by the United Nations since 1948—will not be recognized.

Haven't the two parties, after fifty years of confrontation, proven satisfactorily that unilateral solutions, solutions imposed by force, lead to an impasse? That the five wars won by Israel did not enable it to win the main battle, that for peace?

Israel's security is no longer threatened by Arab countries. In the eyes of Washington (which grants it 3 billion dollars of assistance a year), Israel no longer has the same strategic importance as during the Cold War. The regional context is completely changed after the end of the Gulf War and the war in Lebanon. But the area remains a

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powder keg, where arms purchases continue to intensify as, paradoxically, the factors of uncertainty have multiplied.

And nonetheless, the victory in Gulf War was, as Washington wanted, “total and absolute.” For, this goal besides, this war demonstrated one of the principal givens of the new planetary age: the abyssal technological gulf that separates the rich countries from the others.

If one considers the number of military victims on both sides of this conflict—approximately 100,000 Iraqi soldiers for 115 Americans—the ratio (per thousand) is unique in world military history. Even the troops of Hernan Cortés, launching their attack on the great Aztec Empire in 1521, had greater losses vis à vis their adversaries who, let us recall, knew neither the wheel, nor iron, nor horses, nor gun powder.

This technological gap is a major fact of our time. It reveals a shift on a grand scale which penalizes the South brutally; and not only in times of war. For example, in 1990, two earthquakes of equal intensity (7.2 on the Richter scale) and of identical duration took place in San Francisco and in Iran. The first killed 74, the second 90,000.

The acceleration of capitalist dynamics, spurred by the computer revolution that now electrifies the networks of power, the economy and culture, has made all other models obsolete. In the West, it caused a painful industrial reconversion at the beginning of the Eighties and the ideological disarmament of social democracy. In the East, it ruined the model of the planned economy and entailed, indirectly, the collapse of Communism. It produced a brutal uncoupling of the North from the South, which leaves Third World countries frozen, paralyzed by their own relative backwardness. Everywhere, this acceleration aggravates the major perversion of neoliberalism: its

fantastic aptitude for producing inequalities.

In this respect Black Africa, “badly divided” at the dawn of the Sixties, is in an abyss. The unequal deal has gotten worse. The specter of famine stalks the land in Ethiopia, Congo-Zaire, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Mozambique and Angola. Unemployment is endemic. The medical situation is appalling (70 million Africans may die of the AIDS in the next two decades). The number of refugees increases as states sink into extreme forms of violence: Liberia, Somalia and Rwanda yesterday, Congo-Zaire and Sudan today.

Overwhelmed by silent tragedies, will sub-Saharan Africa return to that “heart of darkness” that British novelist Joseph Conrad identified as early as the Twenties? Long marginalized by chronic underdevelopment, following the period of colonization, the Dark Continent seems still more so since the end of the Cold War and the termination of the East-West confrontation. The “geostrategic advantage” itself, which had benefited a considerable number of leaders, has evaporated, and the hour of drastic reforms arrived. Everywhere we hear expressions of the people’ powerful desire to take the stage, and to found democracy once and for all. In this respect, Africa is undergoing a revolution.

In this wounded continent, the insolent prosperity of the few contrasts sharply with the despair of the majority, victim of misfortunes and the plagues that descend upon this area. State structures, painfully established in the Sixties, are going to pieces. Schools, clinics, roads are disappearing from immense areas; public services are no longer provided; the breakdown of society is spreading; areas of lawlessness are proliferating; corruption is widespread; the economy is dying.

In the new economic order taking shape (and which is charac-

terized by an intensification of exchange between the three dominant poles: the European Union, North America and Japan/Asia-Pacific) Africa is practically excluded. It remains essentially a spectator, beyond the borders of the “global economy.” The developed North seems to need Africa’s products less and less; and Africa, for its part, does not have the means to buy the goods or the services of the North. Even if African manual labor is the cheapest in the world, rare are the industries that set up shop there, because they fear they will not find the essential telecommunications and transport infrastructures as well as political and social stability—which, indeed, the majority of African states cannot guarantee.

Because of these deficiencies, the operating costs of firms in Africa are at least 50% higher than of firms in Asia, where the profits are nine times greater. This is also why direct investment has practically dried up. For example, during the Eighties, ten developing countries received three quarters of the investments carried out in southern countries; none of them was African.

At the same time, the world market prices for the raw materials and the food products that account for 94% of African exports have broken down. The prices of coffee, cotton and copper have fallen by 25%, and those of cocoa have been declining since the middle of the Seventies.

New aggravating factors are added to that. As the recession strikes the rich countries, demand for African products drops further; and the tendency is toward the consumption of synthetic substitutes replacing the natural products (sweetening powders in place of sugar, chemical vanilla flavor in place of true vanilla, etc.). This is a trend that dims still further the prospects for African foreign trade.

Under these conditions, is it astonishing that the Dark Conti-

ment has continued to call for aid and credits? Its foreign debt has tripled in ten years, from 63 to 183.4 billion dollars. This is a colossal figure if one stops to think that it exceeds the sum of all the gross national products (GNP) of the 45 States of sub-Saharan Africa and their 550 million inhabitants. . . but relatively modest when it is known that this sum is hardly equivalent to the GNP of Belgium alone and its ten million inhabitants.

Since 1968, the population of the Dark Continent has doubled, whereas its food production is 20% lower than it was in 1970. This scandalous situation is not the result of fate but, very largely, of the negligence of the men, and primarily of the agricultural policy recommendations (exclusively oriented toward export), of the Northern countries. It is also the result of disorder, wars and the insecurity in the countryside that impels the rural populace into exodus toward the cities. As paradoxical as it may appear in a continent regularly devastated by famines, where 40 million people suffer from hunger and more than 168 million from chronic malnutrition, the majority of the arable lands remain abandoned. Those under cultivation are worked with antiquated means: 80% of the crops are the fruit of human energy alone (four fifths of it, that of women), 16% animal energy, and barely 3% agricultural machinery. This is why, if a massive return toward the countryside and a rapid modernization do not take place food imports will double from now until 2010, going from 10 to 20 million tons a year, and the foreign debt will continue to be grow heavier.

Due to this massive rural exodus, the cities are expanding at a terrific rate. It is calculated that in the next two decades, some 500 million people (that is to say roughly as many people as populate the continent today) will move to the cities. The population of the

metropoli, already prey to all the urban evils, will explode: shanty towns, pollution, lack of transport, widespread overcrowding, violence, insecurity, begging, disease, traffic. . . They are in danger of seeing the proliferation of a "Calcutta"-type, sinister megalopolis, where, in the labyrinth of their infinite sprawl, rootless people wander about.

These people are often victims of the programs of structural adjustment imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which brought about massive layoffs of civil servants, drastic cuts in the education, health and housing budgets, and endangered the already extremely fragile social structure. The relevance of such programs appears less clear, given that one of their principal objectives was to increase export earnings whereas the prices of the principal African export products for the world market has fallen as demand for them has plummeted.

In fact this poverty, which is spreading almost everywhere in the world, has become so much worse in Africa that among the forty countries where the economic and human development is lowest, thirty-two are African; and in the twenty-seven States where human suffering is regarded as the most extreme, twenty are African. The medical situation in particular is disastrous: on average, there is only one doctor for 25,000 inhabitants (there are 3.5 doctors for 1,000 inhabitants in Europe); eight children out of ten die before age of one year, victims of diseases which can easily be prevented by vaccination (tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, whooping-cough, tetanus, measles).

In Malawi and in Uganda, for example, AIDS affects more than 30% of the working population; and on the whole of the Dark Continent, it touches between six and ten million people. AIDS is

destroying African young people the way the First World War tragically decimated Europe's youth.

Faced with the field of ruins of this continent that has become the Third World of the Third World, how can one not question the effectiveness of the assistance provided by the North?

One feels a first inkling of indignation when noting that barely 5% of this aid is really devoted to development. The rest finds its way back, by various routes, to the banks of the North or the European tax havens, in the accounts of intermediaries and the African leadership. Thus, indelicately, the heads of state have built for themselves impressive fortunes; Marshal Mobutu, former President of Zaire, is considered to be worth more than 4 billion dollars.

Another indignation is that French aid, like that of the majority of rich countries, is contingent on orders on the French market. This leads to the proliferation of "white elephants," i.e. gigantic, oversized, and often useless infrastructure projects. If the assistance were not linked, it is estimated that its effectiveness would increase by at least 25%. In addition, most of this aid is military and has led to France to equip and train armed forces which do not hesitate to shoot at bare-handed citizens in Chad, Central Africa, Togo, Gabon, Zaire, Rwanda and elsewhere.

Through their presence in many African countries, units of the French army have long permitted (and still permit to this day) governments that were not elected to remain in power, surrounded by true kleptocracies which plunder the financial resources of the state and make a joke of human rights. Thus, by supporting dictator Habyarimana's regime until the end, France was shown on the international scene to have armed the guilty Hutu militia for the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994.

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Thirty-five years of aid poured down the drain and 300 million poor people—that represent the scope of what has been wasted. The European Union has probably missed the chance to build a true area of co-prosperity. It finds itself, with some concern, facing a bankrupt continent on its southern border at a time when it no longer has the means to fund any great African ambition—and its citizens wonder why they should continue to help Africa, in vain.

This question is all the more understandable since the view of this continent given by the major media, and in particular by television, gives credence to the idea that it has become an outpost of hell, unceasingly traversed by the four riders of the Apocalypse. The media only mention it during massacres, epidemics, cataclysms, and famines; they end up creating, in the collective imagination, the idea that the Dark Continent is a lost cause.

Actually, under the appearance of a generalized bankruptcy, Africa is advancing in the right direction in several fields. In particular, as regards public liberties, the progress is rapid and spectacular. At the moment of the fall of the Berlin Wall, single parties or military juntas controlled thirty-eight of the forty-five African countries. Eight years later, more than half of these countries have had free elections and set up democratic reforms. These reforms remain the essential conditions of development. Without civil liberties, how could anyone prevent the worst plagues that strike the continent from escalating their virulence?

However, the absence of political opposition, press and free trade unions allows the continuation of corruption, encourages armed violence and civil war, and precludes the establishment of collective solutions to avoid famines, to fight droughts and desertification, and to participate in reconstruction work. An estimated 60 million people are

liable to die from the consequences, direct and indirect, of the wars in Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Congo-Zaire, Burundi, etc.

Political calm appears to be an essential condition for a new generation of government finally to tackle industrial development, agro-alimentary production and technical training, three essential objectives that have been abandoned since the Seventies. It is also required, if the States are to benefit finally from the fantastic growth of the unofficial economy which already employs 59% of the working population and develops through the underworld bases of networks and relationships, allowing for skillful circumvention of the obstacles of official corruption.

In the Sixties, in the euphoric aftermath of decolonization, Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, had set the ambitious objective for Africa to catch up with the developed countries: "We must run," he recommended, "while the others are satisfied to walk." Badly advised, badly assisted, badly governed, Africa deteriorated over forty years. But the objective remains the same, and new democratic governments, in the youngest continent of the planet, repeat it like a mantra: Africa can, and must, catch up with the world.

Latin America, at the end of the "lost decade," has assigned itself the same task. Political life on this continent is characterized by a new reality: democracy has spread (almost) everywhere. The soldiers have returned to their barracks. Former dictatorships, like that of Paraguay, have broken down; General Pinochet accepted the verdict of the ballot boxes in Chile and, in 1989, left the palace of Moneda. Except for those of Cuba, and Surinam, all the governments now in place were freely elected, and are regarded as legitimate. The Sandinistas themselves, who had come into power by force in 1979, accepted,

in February 1990, to remove themselves after their defeat at the polls. This withdrawal symbolically marked the end of the three decades of a revolutionary cycle that started with Fidel Castro's victory, in 1959, in Havana.

Henceforth, the traditional guerillas that remain, primarily in Colombia, have relapsed into a semi-banditism, sometimes establishing good relations with the drug traffickers, and do not seriously plan to seize power.

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (ZNLA) is a case unto itself. The Zapatistas made a name for themselves via a spectacular uprising in Chiapas in January 1994. Weapons in hand, they constitute the first riposte of the South against economic globalization and neoliberalism. It is not by chance that its appearance on the international scene coincided with the implementation of the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The ZNLA explicitly aims, as its charismatic leader lieutenant-commander Marcos affirms, "not to conquer power through weapons, but to support the creation of a political context that allows an authentic democracy to really flourish in Mexico."

However, this return to democracy does not guarantee economic development. The dictatorships, that they now replace, supported a great deal of corruption, were unable to prevent brain drain—or that of capital—and often engaged in extravagant expenditure for prestige alone. Foreign debt rose, in 1990, to 450 billion dollars.

All that encouraged the majority of the governments to abandon the growth policies of hyperinflation, and to accept the neoliberal instructions and plans for structural adjustment recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

To reduce the budget deficit, public subsidies for primary

goods were abolished; thousands of officials were put out of work; the budgets for health, education and housing drastically reduced; finally, whole portions of the State sector—in Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador—were privatized. The majority of these countries now turn their backs on the economic policy they have followed since the Forties, characterized by the substitution of imports and autarchic ambitions in a protected market.

George Bush, the former President of the United States, has proposed the creation of a vast free trade area extending from Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego and whose embryo would be the North-American Free Trade Agreement, between Canada, the United States and Mexico (NAFTA), to encourage this “capitalist revolution.” And also to counter, in a planetary context characterized by the globalization of the markets, the powerful economic pole that the European Union represents.

The time has come, here as elsewhere, for regional economic regroupings: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay created, in March 1991, the Common Market of the Southern cone, Mercosur. In addition, the Andean Pact, which combines Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, was revived, as well as the Common Market of Central America; and bilateral free trade agreements, like that signed by Mexico and Chile, are multiplying.

These ultraliberal policies appear, in macroeconomic terms, to be successes. But they accentuate inequalities and aggravate the distress of the middle class, decisive factors of political and social stability; they ascribe an increasingly bewildered population to the unofficial sector. Violence and criminality are on the rise in the cities. Diseases that had been practically eradicated, like cholera and tuberculosis, have reappeared and are spreading. Traffic linked to the cocaine

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trade has intensified as well as the mixing of business and politics.

Inevitable, new questions arise: how to associate economic growth and the fight against inequality? How to escape the paradox of a country that is growing rich but whose inhabitants are increasingly impoverished? Why, in respect for democracy, do governments not lead to intervene, in regard to employment, housing, health and education, to correct the excessive inequalities?

In the entire Asia-Pacific region, neoliberalism has been a success only in nondemocratic States: in South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Chile under General Pinochet. But, in societies which, coming out of authoritative regimes, want to restore democracy, the brutal imposition of liberal policies puts this plan in danger. The citizens feel suddenly abandoned by the State. What good is democracy, they wonder, if it does not make it possible to be protected from this strange abandonment? If it does not quickly improve the material conditions of life?

The modern economy is not only “market and globalization,” it is also, on the whole, productivity growth and technological advancement. However, economic performance nowadays produces only unemployment for the working majority; creating goods is not enough any more to create jobs, even for the Asian “dragons” as the social revolt of January 1997 in South Korea showed.

Industry and services, like agriculture at one time, appear to be threatened with a massive reduction of manual work. Alarming enough in the countries of the North, this prospect is even more so in the South, because of the already excessive number of unemployed.

Blind adoption of liberal recipes by certain countries of the South leads to a modernization that does not intend to reduce the existing abyssal inequalities and—at least initially—does not contem-

plate integrating the disinherited population into the circuit of wealth. In addition, as the State ceases guaranteeing the right to education, housing and health, revolts will multiply. When the dream of development is dissipated, the time of revolutions returns.

The voice of the poor will be heard more and more in a world where, soon, the rich will be five hundred million and the rejects more than five billion . . .

Chapter 8
Culture in Turmoil

Turmoil means fight, combat. At a moment when every intellectual aspect of Western civilization appears to be failing, one wonders in which fights and in which combats is culture engaged? Intellectuals, artists, creators, they all keenly sense that Western societies have once again arrived at a critical juncture.

Decision time is at hand, but we have no frame of reference to guide us with any degree of certainty in this moment of decline, on the brink of the end of one era and the birth of a new one. "We have entered a time when certainty has broken down," notes Edgar Morin. "The world is in a particularly doubtful phase because the broad historical direction has not yet been set. We do not know where are we going. We do not know if there will be great declines, or if this will lead to wars. We do not know if a civilizing process will bring us to a more or less cooperative planetary situation. The future is very unclear."

So here we are at a crossroads in time. We have arrived at one of those junctures where the fundamental cultural rules that set the rhythm of life and the thoughts of mankind are changing, in flux. Everything is upside down. We have to question certainty, to revise our practices, to understand the new parameters of the present times.

European societies are sailing on into modernity, without a clear goal and a clear idea of the future. Can they get by without long-term and in-depth reflection?

It would be madness to give that up. For we are leaving a universe of simple determinism and we are entering a world of complexity where uncertainty, strategy and innovation appear to be highly interdependent. But their relationship remains largely enigmatic. Everything hinges on understanding this. Everyone sees that global equilibrium, in the economy for example, depends less on restrained wills and central decision-making than on extremely delicate mechanisms of regulation often determined by what we call the "global market" and the logic of globalization. In short, many decisions are taken blindly and the political decision-makers are managing by feel.

And that is also our crisis, this mental, intellectual, conceptual incapacity to measure even the crisis' dimensions. Weak growth and mass unemployment in an open economy add tension to a society already frayed, and condemn the political leaders to do without long-term strategies on urgent problems. European society finds itself not only with no growth, but also with no plan. "Nobody knows today," notes Simon Nora, "which are the central impulses that trigger business starts or investment."

The effects of technical progress and the sociological consequences of the 1945-1975 expansion (the rural exodus and de-

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Christianization, the worship of leisure pursuits and the relaxation of manners, the explosion of audio-visual media and communication) have overwhelmed the secular spiritual structures and torn down the ancient cultural guideposts. The improved standard of living, progress in health care, and changes in the concept of happiness have led to a kind of abandonment of the values which used to infuse the whole European social body.

And, since then, the increasing globalization of the economy and of culture has further blurred the national framework; patriotism itself is disappearing, since it was based largely on the identification of the State and society.

Mass culture is triumphing, in particular that which is imposed by the major media, television and advertising. This reinforces the homogenization of all the Europeans but destroys national characteristics in favor of the American model. "Must we submit to the homogenization of practices and the cultural standardization which irresistibly blankets Europe with jeans, polo shirts, western movies, serials, hamburgers, Coke, Pepsi, Pampers, self-service stores, supermarkets?" asks Edgar Morin, before answering: "In fact, Americanization is the most vivid and most conspicuous aspect of a process that originated in Europe itself: capitalist development which transforms everything it touches into merchandise, industrial development that standardizes everything that it absorbs, anonymous technobureaucratic development, excessive urbanization that disintegrates old communities and atomizes our existence into 'the lonely crowd.' This process, which has already corrupted and destroyed so many cultures in the world, is attacking our cultures now. . ."

Thus, stripped of essential cultural reference marks, and having lost their identity, people are facing the current crisis under the

worst mental conditions. However, the new hierarchy of the states that is taking shape in the world is based less on military power, as had been the case until now, than on a mental aptitude to apprehend the expansion of the changes and technological innovations and to extract the maximum profit from the new mechanisms of the markets.

The pace of the technological revolution is speeding up. Its acceleration has jarred every activity of society. When we observe an increasing dematerialization of economic activities (the exploding financial markets) as well as cultural (the proliferation of new digital televisions, video games, the Internet), due to developments in the information sector, will the people be able to handle all the uncertainties?

The principal stumbling blocks are indisputably cultural. The real problem is how to effect, in a society traumatized by the pace of innovation, the release of socio-economic intelligence—and that is, so to say, a cultural issue in the broadest sense. However, to start this “release” probably requires that we take a critical view and start over the process of building our principal cultural parameters, and reconsider the construction of modernity in Europe.

If, during the Fifties and Sixties, people tolerated the collapse of traditional values and often celebrated this collapse as liberating, it is because, at the same time, the old values were replaced by some essential beliefs—progress, science—based on the absolute power of reason. The return to reason in European culture dates from the Middle Ages, a thousand years after the Greco-Roman culture was buried under the Judeo-Christian model.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the confrontation between the Greco-Roman culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition occurred as a culture shock called the Renaissance. Two savagely antagonistic con-

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cepts—faith and reason—went head to head. Faith requires literal respect for the sacred Scripture, direct expression from God. It forms the basis for theology and its concern with God, which became the watchdog of orthodoxy over every form of thought and punished any deviation (through ex-communication, burning at the stake, the Inquisition, torture). The Church, guardian of the interpretation of the texts, imposed its dogma and organization, reigned over everyone's soul, dictated the standards of morals, science, esthetics and of right, defined goodness, truth, beauty, and justice.

The Renaissance rang the death knell of theology's absolute supremacy. The emergence of rational thought encouraged the distinction between philosophy and religion, between humanism and Christianity.

Humanism makes man "the measure of all things," the central subject of the universe, which he has a vocation to control. Logical truth, the result of deduction, is opposed to the dogmatic truth, the fruit of revelation. Humanism opens out then with a force all the greater since it nourishes scientific and technical power. Galileo, Leonard de Vinci, Michael Servetus, Copernicus applied themselves to understanding the laws of the universe. Released from the influence of faith, they devoted themselves to a properly profane task: to control nature.

Progress thus became a new religion, able to secure happiness on earth. Science brought a new and sometimes paradoxical clarity, resulting from "not believing our eyes, believing only our brains." In the 17th century, in the Age of Enlightenment, a system of thought was built to do away with superstition, religion and arbitrary powers for good: rationalism. That was the golden age of the circulation of knowledge, through voyages, correspondence and conversations of

“the salons.” The Republic of Letters disseminated a new thought system.

For thinkers like Descartes, Newton, Rousseau, Diderot, Condorcet, Voltaire, all that exists is regarded as intelligible and, in the light of reason, the universe and its mechanisms must reveal their enigmas. The universe is also mankind, and the ways by which men are ruled, for, rational laws must rule them. Collective reason must govern the city and the individuals (equipped with a new freedom and a dignity): this becomes democracy.

Rationalism reaches its political apex by proposing the *habeas corpus*, by formulating the declaration of the rights of man, and by starting, in the second part of the 18th century, the American and French Revolutions. But the tyranny of reason—just like the sleep of reason—can also produce monsters.

And, for example, the Terror during the French Revolution, would appear to be the expression of intolerance on the part of reason, just as the Inquisition was an expression of intolerance on the part of faith.

Scientific and technological progress, throughout the 19th century, confirm the power of the rational order. They supported Europe’s conquering expansion beyond its borders. And, paradoxically, the triumph of European rationalism would mean, for the other peoples of the Earth, a cultural catastrophe. Thanks to the frightful force of their military machinery, the European powers would control, colonize, and exploit the men of five continents. Often, the other cultures would perceive of rationalist engineering only thought its arrogance, its coldhearted competence, its brutality, before perishing by iron and fire.

In Europe itself, scientific-technical rationality and aberrant

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political rationalizations would launch the states into abominable slaughters during two World Wars. The worst degradations of the spirit—Auschwitz, the Gulag—were created in the name of political reason and of science.

People expected science to provide means of controlling nature. While creating better living conditions, this was particularly expected to make man—released from the most pressing needs—inclined to inner life and the highest activities of culture. However, what science did provide were terrifying nuclear machines and biological and chemical weapons. So much so that certain authors, like André Malraux, would declare, “The problem that is posed to us today is to know whether, on this old land of Europe, is man dead, yes or no?” And Paul Valéry would note: “Having met other civilizations, we now know that ours is mortal: we have heard tell of other worlds that disappeared in their entirety, of empires cast down with all their men and all their machines, descended to the unexplorable bottom of the ages, with their gods and their laws, their academies and their dictionaries. . . We see now that the abyss of history is large enough for everyone. We feel that a civilization has the same fragility as one single life.”

After the Second World War, Europe was divided, defeated, destroyed. Its colonial possessions, dispersed to the four corners of the world, gradually found themselves, from 1947 to 1965, masters of their own destiny. Decolonization focused Europe on herself again, but it is an amputated, disarmed, vanquished Europe.

The disappearance of the intra-European conflicts and powerful non-European threats led the majority of the states of Western Europe to seek a mode of dialogue among themselves and to found the European Economic Community (the EEC). By turning inward now it

made possible for Europe to forget its expansionism of earlier times. Its military and political weakness obliterates its old warmongering ways and its planetary hegemony from 1492 to 1914.

This turning inward, i.e. the decolonization now complete, meant a kind of purification for Europe. This purification should allow the universal values created in the Old Continent—freedom, human rights, democracy—to be exalted, and the aggressive behavior practiced outside its borders—domination, exploitation, colonization, to be forgotten.

All this period—from the end of the Second World War to the Seventies—is also that of an extraordinary economic boom. More than any political decision, this boom brought about radical upheavals of mindsets and morals. In a short time, European populations have gone from shortages to abundance. They have thrown themselves body and soul into consumerism; whereas the countryside has become depopulated, the craftsmen have disappeared, and religious practices have died out.

Gradually, the model of urban civility is suffusing every nation. The mass media—cinema and radio initially, television above all—spread the general life style; advertising harmonizes behaviors, dictates purchasing habits, selects objects of interest. An average form of daily life is established. Meanwhile, families go to pieces, broken by the revolution of manners, sexual freedom, feminist demands—all of which appear to be new problems linked to stress, loneliness, insecurity, etc. These same problems pertain, with slight variations, to all of Europe.

Europe is confronted today by three serious crises: an economic crisis, a demographic crisis and a cultural crisis.

The economic crisis is well known to everyone. It has several

components. It was a surprise, when it first surfaced around 1973, in regard to oil price increases. In fact, it was a long time coming, for the power of Europe rested on an old industrial model: on coal and steel, the basis of the metallurgy industry.

From this point forward, the key to economic success has rested not so much in metallurgical prowess or huge manufacturing capacity, but in computerized process control, in mastery of external markets and in the development of intelligent machines.

The pressing need to export placed Europe at the mercy of international markets (which were themselves at the effect of the planet-wide crisis) and exposed it to the risks of both financial markets and monetary fluctuations. Meanwhile, international trade continues to be governed by a non-European currency, the dollar.

The demographic crisis threatens, in the long term, to lead to the disappearance of Europe. Already today the fertility rate (1.53) is insufficient to simply reproduce the European population, which is decreasing continuously in both absolute and relative terms. In 1939, Europeans represented 18.4% of the world population; in 1997, they represent just 10.2%, and will be only 8.4% in year 2000.

But the crisis is also—and perhaps especially—cultural. It is the role of the intellectuals to ponder questions of culture, and particularly the culture of Europe. But too many extraneous pressures exist that are diminishing and even disabling the role of the intellectual.

In addition to specific difficulties related to the current complexity of reality, intellectuals must face the problem of their prestige having been enormously discredited. The discredit is due to the track record of mounting errors and the indefensible social causes that many of them have long supported.

In spite of that, the role of the intellectual remains essential in

a world where science, for the first time in history, is the only thing that retains the legitimacy of truth—and to whom the whole world gives credence. On the other hand, culture is sinking into what Michel Serres called the “global educational disaster” of contemporary societies.

Indeed, science itself needs intellectuals, men of culture, if only to help society itself respond to the serious problems of deontology and ethics which continue to crop up and which progress and new discoveries will constantly bring to the fore. We recently saw this in connection with the “mad cow” crisis, tainted blood, contaminated growth hormones—not to mention the philosophical problems that bio-technologies pose, and in particular DNA sequencing, the patenting of life forms, the cloning of adult higher mammals, etc.

Science without men of culture can lead, we know, to cruelty. Thus, culture appears more essential than ever; but which culture?

Four cultures coexist in the European countries: anthropological culture, humanistic culture, scientific culture and mass culture. Few individuals have familiarity with the four of them, for they are only weakly interconnected. Furthermore, they are mutually exclusive, even if it is correct to say that contemporary culture is the sum of the four.

Anthropological culture is made up of traditions anchored in habits, from the villages and the countryside, the fairs and the festivals, the proverbs and the superstitions, rural cooking traditions, grandmother’s remedies and the craftsman’s skills. This culture, hidden under the three others, still strongly determines one’s mindset; it is the basis for many inter-group discrepancies and serious miscommunication.

The humanistic culture reached its apogee in the 18th century.

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It is concerned with mankind, nature, the world and society on the level of fundamental questioning about good and evil, life and death, God, the great beyond, etc. Descartes, Montaigne, and Pascal, for example, who were at the same time philosophers, scholars and writers, represent this culture. They proposed great syntheses on these very broad questions.

Scientific culture, on the contrary, requires specialization. It produces an infatuation with knowledge for the sake of knowledge, which leads science to be un-self-critical. The great standard questions of humanistic culture seem pointless, here.

Mass culture consists of an enormous quantity of messages that are constantly destroying each other, scrambling and garbling, transforming themselves into “noise.” There was a concern, once, that this mass culture might progressively invade every aspect of leisure life as, after 1960, mass consumption spread in European societies—the practice of taking vacations using the car, tastes in leisure pastimes, television-watching, etc.. This latter has spread throughout Europe since the end of the Fifties, causing a true revolution of morals and manners.

The Europe of television, Eurovision, became a reality as of June 1954. The countries of the Old Continent plunged then into a new age of communication. Gradually, a dense forest of antennas covered them. And the audio-visual era began, the era of the electronic image. A new civilization took shape whose matrix, developed in the United States, is—for the first time in two millennia—foreign to Europe.

The power of images is exploited by the advertising industry. These short “spots,” quick-paced, constitute an extremely seductive kind of televisual. They transform the general tempo of this medium.

Television becomes the art of the clip, a rat-a-tat-tat, one or two frames a second. That reduces the language of film, and standardizes the structures and forms used.

But even the culture of television was dislocated under the violence and the shock of the economic crisis in the middle of the Seventies.

What this crisis highlighted was the extreme vulnerability of Europe, as well as the need for a reconversion—of a “restructuring.” In the absence of social laws, younger nations, especially in Southeast Asia, could now manufacture more cheaply than European firms; and they attract many firms interested in relocating.

The new technological changes have been exploited in certain countries (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and in other nations of Asia-Pacific in particular) more effectively than in Europe.

It is in this pessimistic context of foreboding that, suddenly, the Cold War was ended—somewhat to the general surprise. And one began to think that this great Western victory would bring about the end of the crisis, as if by magic, and lead us into a new era of prosperity.

Indeed, what illusions, and what hopes were there born after the promising events of the second half of 1989: in particular, the “Velvet Revolution” in Prague, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of tyranny in Bucharest!

Suddenly, the 70 million who died between August 1914 and May 1945, on the battle fields, in the death camps, during deportations or because of epidemics and famines linked to the wars, seemed not to be sacrificed in vain. “History and morals are reconciled,” the writer (and Czech president) Vaclav Havel could affirm, thinking that the

hour had finally arrived for building the society of which so many intellectuals had dreamed about, based on democratic virtues, ethics and responsibility, in which what was essential would not be the profit and power but the direction of the community and mutual respect.

That was a fleeting and misleading moment. For, ever since, the torrent of changes has continued and too many anti-heroic images have obscured and buried and obliterated the images of freedom's triumph. In particular, just within Europe: images from the Bosnian war; unbearable scenes of civilians crushed by a violence which left 140,000 dead, 70,000 mutilated, 3 million refugees. . . "The mechanics of punishment," as the essayist George Steiner calls them, has surfaced again, stimulated by the irrational pulse of nationalist passions, the lure of factionalism and the hurricane of hatred.

"And to say that the century that began with such generous ideas and such great figures: Freud, Kafka, Gide, Sartre, Camus. . . the strength of European culture, until the middle of this century"—the Italian intellectual Rossana Rossanda sighs—"was to see, in its mixed character, its creative combinations: one might be born in Budapest, live in Vienna, write in German, speak Hungarian . . ."

In ex-Yugoslavia, the recent outburst of sadism and cruelty poses once again, to the philosophers and intellectuals of our time, the question of the human condition. "Ethnic cleansing" and "purification" ridicule the very idea of humanity, democracy and attest to the bankruptcy of the Rationalists. The writer Susan Sontag who, to demonstrate her solidarity with the Bosnian population, staged Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, in August 1992, in Sarajevo, suggests that "like Godot, the inhabitants of Sarajevo awaited in vain an intervention from Europe which never came. . ." No advanced civilization can be based on indifference to criminality.

The horizon of hope seems to have receded so far that rare are even the intellectuals who perceive the birth of new collective dreams. “The students whom I used to teach,” says George Steiner, “all had a window on hope: whether it was Mao, or Allende, or Dubcek, or Zionism. There was always a place where one fought to change the world. Now that is finished.”

As the reflection of Western societies, most intellectuals no longer see themselves clearly in the mirror of the future. They seem overtaken by distress, intimidated by the shock of new technologies, disturbed by the globalization of the economy, worried by the degradation of the environment, distrustful of the great official institutions (parliament, justice, the police force, schools, medicine, the media) and, finally, severely demoralized by a proliferating corruption that is spreading like gangrene through everything.

Creative people, for their part, remain perplexed. Too many upheavals have upset the order of the world; the most stable foundations give in, and are finally carried off by the avalanche of events. “What impresses me,”—the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes notes—“is that, three years ago, we were all celebrating an extraordinary end of century, we were talking at that time about the end of history, the solution of problems, the triumph of capitalism and democracy. Three years later, we find ourselves plunged into the utmost perplexity. Everything has to be reformulated. Everything has to be thought through again.”

Abruptly, a profusion of new problems of all kinds has emerged—some radically new, like the disassembling of the planned economies; others, extremely archaic—ultranationalisms inspired by the ideology of “blood and land” and its degenerative mystical identifications which cause absurd and tragic “ethnic wars.”

To all that we must add the aggravation of economic recession. The logic of the market, free trade and the search for maximum profit are threatening the cultural and creative domains.

In this respect, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s negotiations which include fields related to cultural production, in particular in the audio-visual and cinematography industry, are disquieting to all the cultural milieus of Europe. The United States, which has imposed its model in the field of mass culture, is indeed determined to bypass any directive allowing quotas for European films on Old Continent television channels. And creative professionals are alarmed.

The more so as the new television, these days, imposes a different model. It is multipolar and planetary in scale; thanks to digital compression, the number of available channels tends to increase constantly, tailoring themselves to increasingly narrow segments of the public. The topics and subjects of the channels in the digital bouquet become as varied as the number of magazines at a newsstand. (This is, for the most part, pay television.)

On the other end of the spectrum, the last remaining channels for the general audience are placing their own universe at the center of their concerns. The world of television becomes their principal subject. In short, television is centered on the only subject which interests the greatest number of viewers and which very often constitutes their single culture: television itself.

Communication industry megagroups have recently been formed by a rapid effect of concentration of capital. They aspire to control a pool of viewers vaster than their traditional market and they exhibit international ambitions, on a European or global scale. These groups currently adopt what we have come to call a "multimedia strategy" and they produce images adapted to the multiplication of the

broadcast networks.

Economic performance thus comes into conflict with culture and democracy, which seem to have forgotten the warning launched by the writer Raymond Queneau in 1938: “The aim of any social transformation is the happiness of the individuals and not the fulfillment of inescapable economic laws.”

In the current climate of cultural pessimism, many creators seem pained by the individualistic self-absorption and “esthetic revisionism.” Others, even if it seems obsolete, choose to engage; thus, the Spanish painter Miguel Barcelo, considered one of the most brilliant revelation of the new contemporary painting, who lives in Mali, expresses his revulsion for the inequalities between the North and the South. “The most atrocious things are perhaps the least spectacular, as for example the way in which the West crushes the Third World between the World Bank, appropriations, and the control of the raw materials of the poorest countries in the world. It is a situation crueller than colonialism. At least, during colonialism, the Northern countries felt obliged to build roads and schools. Now they have no obligation. It is pure plundering.”

Thus, facing the traditional alternative of having to choose between imitating Narcissus, in love with himself, and Prometheus, who acted on behalf of mankind by stealing fire from the gods, many creators continue to prefer the latter. They are not oblivious to the risks, and they know to what interminable anguish Titan was condemned—locked with bronze chains to the summit of the Caucasus, an eagle coming to devour his liver which always grew back—but they take on this burden because they sense that the well-being of our culture lies therein.

Once again, creative people take up the challenge of having to

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express, through their genius, the sufferings of the era far better than the politicians and the experts could do. They also know that, according to Aeschylus, the torment of Prometheus will cease the day that an immortal will take his place—and that, then, humanity will be saved.

Chapter 9

The Internet Era

The spectacular development of communication and information technologies has inaugurated, on a planetary scale, a phenomenon that transforms civilization. The industrial era and the “consumer society” are giving way little by little to what is called “the information society.” Some even say that the social, economic and cultural consequences will be much more profound than those caused by the industrial revolution around the middle of the 19th century. As of now, whole sectors of economic activity—finance, trade, recreation, research, education, and the media—are profoundly disrupted by the flood of new electronic networks and of multimedia and digital technologies.

“At the heart of this shift,” we read in a recent UNESCO document, “is technological progress: the possibility of digitizing various forms of information—text, numbers, sounds and images—and combining them in a single product, the famous ‘multimedia;’ artificial

intelligence and the incorporation, within information products and services, of interactive interfaces adapted to the user's needs, digital compression and switching techniques that facilitate the transfer of increasingly large volumes of data, exponential progress in computing power together with spectacular cost reductions, cheap fiber optic cable and new wireless technologies and, probably more impressive than all, the explosive growth of data processing networks and especially the largest of them, the Internet, which connects millions of personal computers and users throughout the whole world."

"The combination and interaction of these technologies give rise to new products and services based on video, image and voice manipulation, powerful techniques making it possible to automate information retrieval and all kinds of routine transactions, which a whole ensemble of inter-connected networks makes increasingly accessible. These "new" technologies or, more precisely, these new uses of technology, are stimulating the convergence of various branches of activity. In the industrialized countries, one has already had for a few years cable operators, telecommunication services, and radio-tele-broadcasting network operators, as well as strategic partnerships and alliances being launched among the data processing, publishing and leisure industries. Eager to extend their activities outside their traditional borders by proposing interactive services, information suppliers and distributors are attacking new markets aggressively."¹

In the aggregate, these technologies offer immense possibilities for the promotion and stimulation of artistic creation. But it is feared that the United States' quasi-absolute domination of these technologies may lead us into new forms of dependence and a condition of cultural vassalage. World culture, the global culture—in English—is spreading on a planetary scale and is imposing itself every-

where, not only in the countries of the South, but even in the European countries.

In this respect, many citizens wonder whether the new multimedia wars will not be as serious a defeat for Europe as that which film and television experienced in their confrontation with the United States.

Audiovisual was covered, like the other services, in the GATT regulations (now the World Trade Organization). But, within these rules, there was no agreement between the two parties. The United States regularly threatens to file a claim against the European Union, guilty of practicing "*distortions of competition*" through its government aid to the film industry.

However, a glance at the statistics is enough to show that the United States is the most protectionist country in the world, in this field, and that they import from abroad less than 2% of their audiovisual consumption!

On the other hand, in the European Fifteen, from 1985 to 1994, receipts at the cinemas, for American films, went from 400 to 520 million, meaning their market share rose from 56 to 76%. The receipts for national films (each one on its own national market) fell, over the same period, from 177 to million 89, that is a decline in market share from 25 to 13%.

If we consider the television situation, we see that it is very similar. On the fifty-odd European television channels with nationwide range, which excludes the cable networks and encrypted channels, American films accounted for 53% of the programming in 1993, national films in their respective countries 20%, and European films from other countries 23%.

Hollywood had a commercial surplus of more than 4 billion

dollars with Europe in 1995, and nearly 56% of the receipts for American films come from export. Hollywood has a vital need for the European market. In ten years, the commercial balance-sheet of European audiovisuals versus the United States has declined badly (the losses were 0.5 billion dollars in 1985; and they grew to 4 billion dollars in 1995) which entailed, for the European Union, the disappearance of some 250,000 jobs. . .

The audiovisual and film industry have become, for the United States, the leading exporters, the top cash provider, ahead even of the aerospace industry. This is why the Department of Commerce in Washington fights everything that impedes the expansion of the American audiovisual products very hard.

But these battles around cinema and television seem minor compared to those yet to come in the field of multimedia. The fantastic technological upheavals of the last two decades have increased the stakes. The globalization of the exchanges of signals was fabulously accelerated. The data processing and communication revolution has set off the explosion of the two true nervous systems of modern societies: the financial markets and the information networks.

Data transmission at the speed of light, the digitalization of texts, images and sounds, the use of telecommunications satellites, the revolution of telephony; the generalization of computerization in the majority of the manufacturing and service sectors, the miniaturization and networking of computers on a planetary scale, increasingly have upset the world order.

Hyperconcentration and megamergers are multiplying, giving birth to world-size enterprises whose objective is the media conquest of the planet. In the United States, the new alliance between Microsoft and NBC, which belongs to General Electric, means to create a

planetary information channel (MSNBC), in competition with CNN (itself purchased recently by Time-Warner, the world's leading communication group). Rupert Murdoch is also thinking about it, and is looking to merge his various continental networks, Fox (the United States), Sky (Europe) and Star (Asia), to create a "global channel," whose embryo, Fox News Service, was launched in October 1996 in the United States and is intended to be received throughout the whole world.

In this context, consumer electronics seems to be one of the principal sectors of the future. To control multimedia is becoming a strategic objective on the policy, technological, industrial and cultural planes. The appearance of new products (electronic publishing with CD-ROM, educational software, personal microcomputers, disk players, television set-computers, multimedia terminals. . .) and of new services (accessing databases from work or from home, telecommuting, the Internet) is based on the marriage of data processing, television, the telephone and the satellite through the mastery of digital technologies.

The world audiovisual landscape is on the way to seeing deep upheavals caused by the rapid extension of digital television which, on one channel, makes it possible to broadcast up to ten times more stations. This potential offer is called the "digital bouquet." In the United States, Direct-TV and USSB are marketing, by satellite, two bouquets composed of 175 and 25 channels respectively. These prospects revive a wild competition between the United States, Europe and Asia. Thus, Philips and Sony announced the launch, in 1997, of the digital video disc (DVD) which could revolutionize the hi-fi family by replacing all at once the compact disk, the CD-ROM, and the video cassette, by offering unequalled information storage capacity in digital

quality.

The globalization of the markets, of the financial circuits and the ensemble of immaterial networks is leading to radical deregulation, as testified by the Geneva Agreement on telecommunications, of February 17, 1997. . . with all it means for the declining role of the nation-state and of the public services. It is the triumph of the corporation and its values, private interests, and market forces.

This also changes the very definition of “freedom of expression.” People’s freedom of expression is set in direct competition with the “freedom of commercial expression,” which is presented as a new “human right.”

We are witnessing a constant tension between “the absolute sovereignty of the consumer” and the will of the citizenry guaranteed by the democracy.

This claim to “freedom of commercial expression” was the principle upon which the lobbying action of interprofessional organizations were structured (advertising agencies, public relations firms and the media), when the debates began, in the second half of the Eighties, on the new rules of *Television without borders*, regarding the European Union.

This “freedom of commercial expression” is indissociable from the old principle, invented by American diplomacy, of *the free flow of information*, which always played down the question of inequalities in terms of communications. The doctrine of globalization equates freedom, plain and simple, with freedom to do business.

Since the late Eighties, organizations like GATT (since changed into WTO), became the central locuses for the debates on the new order in communication. Classified as a “service,” communication provided the occasion for direct confrontation between the Euro-

pean Union and the United States as mentioned above.

At the time of this disagreement, one could see the gap widening between the ideologists of merchandise, as a norm applicable to any production, and the defenders of cultural identities. There were contradictions of a new type on both sides and the debate is far from finished. The problem of the image-making industries quickly joined with that of the "information highways," fruit of digital compression and the hybridization of the television set, the telephone and the computer.

The central idea is the need for letting free competition play on a free market between free individuals. It is expressed in roughly these terms: "Let people look at what they want to. Leave them free to enjoy. Trust their common sense. The only sanction applied on a cultural product must be its failure or its success in the market."

Politicians are quick to erect screens of grandiose conclusions: the citizens must prepare to plunge into "a world that is swimming in information." Gone are the constraints and the obstacles to which the publishing, film, music and audiovisual industries were so long subjected.

At the hour of multimedia and cyberspace, a question is posed: will the traditional media be supplanted at this change of millenium by the new miracle that the Internet represents? Is all of mankind destined to become equal citizens in cyberspace?

In 1995, the number of personal computers in use worldwide was approximately 180 million, for a global population of almost six billion individuals. Access to the Internet was thus limited to 3% of the people. In 1995, only a small number of rich countries, accounting for approximately 15% of the world population, had approximately three quarters of the telephone lines, without which one cannot reach

the Internet. . . More than half of the planet had never used a telephone. In 47 countries, there was only one line per hundred inhabitants. In all of Black Africa there are fewer telephone lines than in the single city of Tokyo, or on the island of Manhattan in New York.

In January 1996, it was estimated that 60% of the computers connected to the Internet belonged to the Americans. What language dominates cyberspace? English.

The social disparities caused by the era of electronics will likely be comparable to the inequalities resulting from the immense international financial investments. As for the economic forces that these networks monopolize, they are disseminating, or worse, reinforcing, the obstacles that prohibit access to them by ordinary people.

The stakes for the future are crucial. The American program, *The National Information Infrastructure*, Bible of William Clinton and his vice president Albert Gore, is clear: "Free enterprise must ensure the development of the info-routes."

With rampant privatization, these networks and especially the Internet gradually will be released from any public service obligation, to the benefit of private interests.

In the poor countries, no fewer than 26 telephone companies will be put up for sale in the next three years. Is that the global standard of the future? Private ownership of all the structures which constitute the platform of cyberspace?

The telecommunication giants such as AT&T, Microsoft and MCI are embroiled in a ferocious competition. They hope to establish secure colonies in cyberspace by combining their name recognition with the prowess of their marketing teams, which will provide them with extraordinary clout in the field of customer service and invoicing. And will allow them to entertain the idea of taking over the Internet.

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For the decisive battle, on a planetary scale, has at stake the control of the three industrial sectors—computers, television, telephony—which are now merging with the Internet. The group that reigns over the Internet will dominate the world of communication tomorrow, with all the risks that that implies for the culture and the independence of mind of the people.

The Internet, that electronic network that makes it possible to connect every computer on the planet, is no longer being introduced. Practically unknown to the general public just three years ago, the Internet has become a world social phenomenon engendering passions and controversies. As often happens with the sudden arrival of a technological innovation that takes the world by storm, many are enchanted, others are frightened.

If the origins of the network are found back in the Sixties, its true birth goes back to 1974, when in response to a wish of the Pentagon, a professor from the University of California at Los Angeles, Vint Cerf, created the common standard making it possible to connect every computer and gave it its name: Internet. Vint Cerf had discovered that computers, like humans, are gregarious, and that they are never so effective as when they are connected to other computers.

But the massive development of the Internet galaxy is far more recent; it dates in fact from 1989 when, in Geneva, researchers from CERN established the World Wide Web, “the Web,” founded on a hypertext concept that transformed the Internet into a more user-friendly network. Thanks to the Web, the number of computers connected throughout the world doubles each year, and the number of websites every three months. It is estimated that by the year 2000, there will be approximately 300 million Internet users; and that the time spent in front of a computer screen will be higher, in the

developed countries, than that spent in front of the television. Electronic mail, chat groups and file transfers are the most frequent uses; they are fast, easy, interactive and not very expensive.

Structured as networks of networks, the Internet is very resilient (it was conceived, during the Cold War, to survive a nuclear attack). They say that it is “trying to destroy it would be like shooting a spiderweb with a shotgun pellet.” Its protocol is in the public domain and does not belong to any commercial firm. Indestructible, decentralized, belonging to everyone, the Internet (which was mostly used, early on, by university professors and the centers of the American counterculture) brought back the utopian dream of a harmonious human community, planetary, where everyone relies on each other to improve his knowledge and to sharpen his intelligence.

These characteristics, while indisputable, should not prevent us from reflecting on the dangers which currently lurk inside the Internet. On the one hand, cults, negationist promoters and pornography peddlers are already invading this network; in addition, commercial enterprises are looking to take control of it, whereas two thirds of humanity are, in fact, excluded from the Internet. A host of new problems arise, legal, ethical, political, and cultural. Will the Internet be able to hold on as a forum for free expression, inexpensive, open to all people, and sheltered from the big multimedia predators?

What really threatens the Internet are the big communication behemoths' increasingly manifest temptation to commercially monopolize the “network of networks.” Businesses are jumping to attack the Internet because they see it as a new source of inexhaustible profits. According to them, the ‘cyber’ era succeeds the television era and, in the same way, it should provide profits on a very grand scale. The eagerness with which the giant Microsoft currently undertakes its

conquest is evidence enough.

A few months after having launched into cyberspace *Slate*—a sophisticated and original news magazine—Bill Gates' company took a new step in content providing by joining with the American television station, National Broadcasting Company (NBC, which belongs to General Electric), whose television news have the largest audience in the United States.

Together, these two communication giants have invested nearly a billion dollars in order to establish a new type of network of uninterrupted information that, for the first time, marries television and the computer. This futuristic network, baptized MSNBC (Microsoft-National Broadcasting Company), broadcasts information which one can simultaneously see on one's television set (by cable), read in teletext on the computer screen, and also watch in images and sounds on a website (<http://www.msnbc.com>) on the Internet. In short, television news can now be received on one's computer.

MSNBC came out on July 15, 1996; this uninterrupted information network via television and computer seeks to compete directly with CNN broadcasting company, and testifies to the bitterness of the war to control information waged by the large industrial firms.

The Internet boom is creating a new form of inequality between the 'info-rich' and the 'info-poor,' not only in the North, in the developed countries; where only a minority of the people have their own personal computers, but especially in the South, where the lack of basic equipment is marginalizing millions of people.

As mentioned above, there are, for example, more telephone lines installed on the single island of Manhattan (New York) than in all of Black Africa and, as we know, without a telephone connected to a computer, it is impossible to reach to Internet. And that does not even

address the issue of under-supply of electricity (more than two billion people on the planet are without electricity) as well as the disastrous situation with regard to eliminating illiteracy.

There is no doubt that with the Internet, a medium to become as banal as the telephone, we are entering a new era of communication. Many hypothesize, somewhat ingenuously, that the more communication there is in our societies, the more social harmony will reign there. They are mistaken. Communication in itself does not constitute social progress, and especially when the big commercial multimedia firms control it. Or when it contributes to intensifying the differences and the inequalities between citizens of the same country, and between the inhabitants of the same planet.

Where is the Internet used the most? In the commercial domain. In October 1996, the commercial sector accounted for more than a quarter of all the website hosts, greatly exceeding the "education" domain used by university institutions.

And yet the dream that the Internet embodies, that of a universal exchange of information without barriers, is far from dead. But, as long as the transmission of knowledge continues to follow the standards imposed by politico-economic power, this ideal of "a democracy of information" will remain a Utopian idea.

In 1961, leaving the White House, General Eisenhower stated that the military-industrial complex was "a threat to democracy." In 1996, at the moment when a true industrial-information complex is being established, and at the same time certain American leaders speak about *virtual democracy* with accents that recall mystical fanaticism, the threat of cybernetic vassalization becomes very real.

Already pretty unreliable, the information system is on the threshold of a radical revolution with the advent of the Internet and

multimedia that some compare, by its induced chaos, with Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. The combination of the television set, the computer and the telephone has created a new communication apparatus, interactive, founded on digital processing. By bringing together the multiple talents of various media (to which we should add the fax, electronic data interchange (EDI) and electronic money), multimedia marks a rupture that could upset the entire field of communication, and that of economics, as the American President, William Clinton, hopes. He launched the ambitious plan of the electronic superhighway to put the United States in the lead again in the industries of the future.

Gigantic concentrations continue between the mammoth corporations of the telephone, cable, data processing, advertising, video and cinema industries. Acquisitions and mergers follow one another, mobilizing tens of billions of dollars. . . . Some dream of a perfect market of information and communication, completely integrated thanks to the electronic and satellite networks, without borders, functioning in real time and permanently. They imagine it built on the model of the capital market and the uninterrupted financial flows. . . .

People remember the warnings launched at one time by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley against the false progress of a world managed by the thought police. They fear the possibility of a subtle conditioning of mentalities on the planet-wide scale. In the great industrial scheme conceived by the owners of the leisure corporations, everyone notes that information is considered first and foremost as merchandise; and that this character wins out, by far, over the fundamental mission of the media: to clarify and enrich the democratic debate.

New technologies will be able to contribute to the improve-

ment of democracy only if we fight, first of all, against the caricature of world society prepared by the multinationals who have thrown themselves full speed into the construction of the information highway.

Coming once again from the United States, but briskly passed along by Europeans, this new preaching serves the interests of ultra-liberalism. The new planetary aristocracy of finance, the media, computers, telecommunications, transport and leisure are jumping up and down with abundance and sufficiency. They proclaim themselves the engine of the society of knowledge, of the revolution of intelligence.

The global networks of competing corporations are counting on the information and communication highway to help them manage their business, implement their strategies of conquest, develop and impose their standards, and defend the monopolistic positions they have acquired in the markets.

The same applies to financial capitalism. One of the greatest contributions of new technologies to the contemporary economy was the acceleration of the movements of capital. In this context, the techno-Utopia of the information society allows the new planetary leading class to affirm and gain acceptance for globalization, that is, the total liberalization of every market, everywhere in the world.

According to new Masters of the Universe, the information society calls for new forms of regulation going beyond the State. They require that the regulation be left only to the global market.

Notes

1. *L'Unesco et la société de l'information pour tous*, document d'orientation, Paris, UNESCO, May 1996.

Postface

The Archipelago Model

A long time has already passed since Washington could proclaim the birth of a “New World Order,” after the Gulf War (1991). In fact, in the sphere of geostrategy and geopolitics, things have become terribly complicated. So complicated that one may well speak of a “geopolitics of chaos” to define this period.

Uncertainty is the watchword of the day, and everyone is seeking the fundamental principles, the guidelines that would make it possible to chart the current changes, and to understand better the direction of the development of the international politics as the century draws to an end. For everything is linked: politics, economics, society, culture and ecology.

The dominant dynamic, these days, is the globalization of the economy. It is based on the ideology of “the single thought,” which decreed that only one economic policy is possible from now on, and that only the criteria of the market and of neoliberalism (competitiveness, productivity, free trade, profitability, etc.) allow a

society to survive in a planet that has become a competitive jungle. Onto this hard core of contemporary ideology, new mythologies have been grafted which try to force citizens to accept the new state of the world.

The generalized merchandization of words and things, of bodies and spirits, nature and culture, is the central characteristic of our time. It places violence at the heart of the new ideological plan which, more than ever, rests on the power of the mass media that is in full expansion because of the explosion of new technologies. To the spectacle of violence, and to the mimicry thereof, are increasingly added, in a very insidious way, new forms of censorship and intimidation which mutilate reason and obliterate the spirit.

Whereas democracy and freedom are apparently triumphing, in a planet partially relieved of authoritative regimes, censorship and manipulation are making a paradoxical return to power under extremely varied guises. New and seductive “opiates of the people” offer a kind of “best of all possible worlds,” distracting citizens and diverting them from civic action and demands. In this new age of alienation, at the hour of world culture, “global culture,” and planetary messages, communication technologies play a central role more than ever before.

At least two general theories of explanation were recently proposed by American essayists: that of “the end of history,” by Francis Fukuyama, and that of “the clash of civilizations” by Samuel Huntington. They have both quickly shown their weaknesses and deficiencies before the complexity of the current chaotic situation.

The situation is characterized, on the one hand, by a threefold revolution: technological, economic and sociological.

Technological: Just as the industrial revolution replaced muscle by machine, in the current data-processing revolution, the brain is

being replaced (at least in an increasingly significant number of its functions) by the computer. This “general cerebralization” of production equipment (in industry as well as in services) is further accelerated by the explosion of new telecommunications networks and by the proliferation of the cyber-worlds.

Economic: Globalization remains the dominant phenomenon, without a doubt; that is to say the increasingly strong interdependence of many countries' economies because of the requirements of commercial free trade. Thanks to technological acceleration, globalization especially affects the financial sector that currently dominates the economic sphere, by a considerable margin. Functioning according to rules that they set unilaterally, the financial markets dictate their laws to the States and the political leaders. In other words, the economic rules over the political.

Sociological: The two preceding revolutions have put the traditional concept of power in crisis—particularly that of political power. Some even see in that the start of a situation that could lead to the death of politics (in the modern sense of this term, which appeared in the 18th century) and allowing a return to the conditions of the *Ancien Régime*. In such a context, democracy loses most of its credibility, for the citizens can no longer act effectively, by their vote, in the decisive field of the economy, which has been placed beyond attack. In addition, the economy is more and more disconnected from social issues and refuses to endorse the consequences (unemployment of mass proportions, impoverishment, exclusions, fractures) caused by the adoption of the logic of the globalization of the markets. This is also why some herald the death of labor, or the final end of full employment.

New paradigms: This triple revolution is accompanied by a

change of at least two fundamental paradigms (general models of thought) on which until now the socio-politic construct of the great modern democratic States rested: progress and the machine.

The first aimed to reduce inequalities and to eliminate violence from social relations. The second regarded the national community as a kind of clock, consisting of parts that each have a function, all being interdependent (with none being redundant), and collectively making the system function.

These two essential paradigms that supported the contemporary socio-politic construct are now, in fact, replaced by two others: communication and the market, respectively.

It is communication that formulates the promise of happiness at the level of the family, the school, the company or the State. Thus the endless proliferation of communication instruments, of which Internet is a total, global and triumphant result. The more we communicate, they tell us, the more harmonious our society will be and the happier we will be.

One might even question whether communication has not just exceeded its optimal state, its zenith, and entered a phase where all its qualities are transformed into defects, all its virtues into vices. For the new ideology of total-communication, this communication imperialism has been exerting a genuine oppression on the citizens.

For a long time communication was liberating, because it meant (since the invention of writing and that of the printing press) the spread of knowledge, insights, the laws and the light of reason against superstitions and obscurantism of all kinds. Now, by imposing itself as an absolute obligation, by flooding every aspect of life, social, political, economic and cultural, it exerts a tyranny. It has probably become the greatest superstition of our time.

In addition, society gives up the lead to the market, which, like a liquid or a gas, infiltrates, permeates all the interstices of human activity and converts them to its logic. Even the fields that have long been at the margin of the market (culture, sports, religion, death, love, etc.) have now been entirely won over to its laws of general merchandization, and supply and demand.

The PPII System: This new paradigmatic couple (communication plus market) supports the expansion of all the activities of the PPII system (planetary, permanent, immediate, immaterial), in particular, the financial markets, the content (TV programs, electronic data exchange, news releases) conveyed by the new communication and information technologies and all activities related to cyberculture (primarily the Internet).

All these changes, rapid and fantastic, severely destabilize the political leadership. For the majority, they feel overwhelmed by a cascade of upheavals that change the rules of the game and leave them partially powerless. They do not call any less, with a hue and a cry, for “modernization” and “an adaptation” to the new times.

Many citizens have the impression that the true world leaders are not those who appear to hold the political power, and that the heads of state are just about all being left in the dust by the days' events; they do not seem to be up to dealing with a crisis whose parameters are obscure to most people.

Two dynamics. To those aspects already cited, we must add the two principal dynamics that are at work on the strictly geopolitical plane—fission, on the one hand, and fusion, on the other.

Fission. Its rupturing, fracturing, breaking force is perceptible across the planet. Based on the inflammable energy of nationalism and the glorification of distinctive ethnic features considered to be

sacred (language, blood, religion, territory), this dynamic of fission impels communities (in the ethnic sense) everywhere to claim a political status of sovereignty, indeed to break out of the structures of the nation-state.

It is for this reason, for example, that the three federations existing until 1991 in Eastern Europe—the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—burst apart. This dynamic of fission, in addition, is also the cause of some of the most serious recent conflicts, in particular in the Caucasus (wars in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaidjan) and in the Balkans (wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia). Only the Federation of Russia remains, in the East, but fission is already undermining it, as was tragically shown by the recent war in Chechnya.

But fission is also weakening states in Western Europe, where the separatist impulses are multiplying with more or less intensity and outbreaks of violence. For example, in Spain (Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia), in Italy (Padania), Belgium (Flanders), France (Corsica), the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales), etc. And one can observe the same phenomenon in North America (Quebec), in Africa (where we have even seen Eritrea detach itself from Ethiopia), in Asia (Sri Lanka, India, China, Indonesia) and in Oceania (Bougainville).

Fusion. At the same time, and with a comparable energy, everywhere in the world, States are tending to come together, to create ties, to be integrated into economic, commercial, and even political regions. The most recent example of fusion is, of course, that of the European Union wherein states, long considered each other's worst enemy, are converging and considering a political union.

This federative model, pacificatory, and in particular its economic embryo, is reproducing in many areas of the planet where

Postface: The Archipelago Model

integrated commercial areas are blossoming. Thus, in North America, the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), combining Canada, the United States and Mexico; in South America, Mercosur, uniting Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay; in northern Africa, the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA) comprising Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania; in southern Africa, the Middle East, by the Black Sea, in Asia-Pacific, etc.

The archipelago model. Will fusion win out over fission? But, if fusions multiply on account of globalization, will that not lead toward the proliferation of another type of fission, social this time, that some describe as a “concussion?” For, in this respect, at this end of century, world is structured on the model of the archipelago: islands, in increasing numbers, of the poor and excluded in the North; and small islands, increasingly concentrated, of rich, affluent people in the South.

And that takes place on a planet where the inequalities grow more stark and where, of 5 billion inhabitants, hardly 500 million live comfortably, while 4.5 billion remain in want. A planet where the fortune of the 358 richest people, billionaires in dollars, is higher than the annual income of the 45% the poorest inhabitants, that is 2.6 billion people. Such gaps are grave threats against which the traditional weapons of power are not effective.

For one does not wage the war in the same way against a traditional adversary and against the true threats of our time: organized crime, mafia networks, financial speculation, large scale corruption, the spread of new epidemics (AIDS, the Ebola virus, Creutzfeld-Jakob, etc.), intense pollution, fundamentalism, population migrations, the greenhouse effect, desertification, nuclear proliferation, etc.

How can we resist being encircled by the dominant ideology?

Faced with so many uncertainties and dangers, isn't it time to rebuild society on this planet and to rethink, finally, the role of a United Nations organization less dependent on the United States and more concerned with human suffering?

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