

From Universal to Particular

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With problems of a fundamental nature we should always stand back to understand the empirical reality. We need to look for their most subtle origins so that the words used can become effective. There is no doubt that the invisible is the central nucleus from which human matters are organized, the *concealed centrality* which we must learn to decipher in the effervescence of explosive phenomena, or in the banality of daily life.

In accordance with common sense the most acute minds are quite well aware that ideas make the world go round. But we must hold intellectual conformity at arm's length, and even despise it because its commonplaces iron out the richness of the real by reducing to unity the multiplicity of differences.

That is why we need to set up a *heterology*, that is, a knowledge of the multiple, which alone is able to recognize the richness of life. 'What is well known,' Hegel used to say, 'by the very fact that it is *well known*, is not truly known.' And indeed the ideas that rule the world, the imaginary in its fertilizing power, remain enigmatic, in many ways nebulous and unsure of themselves. They are nevertheless the cement structuring the feeling of belonging whose importance can no longer be denied. Strictly speaking 'aesthetic values around which the various postmodern tribes obstinately cluster'.

And so the obvious nature of universal morality, like right-thinking moralism which is its expression, can no longer withstand the frenzied attacks from particular ethics. This distinction (morality-ethics) becomes necessary when we recognize how outdated and incantatory are the plethora of worthy sentiments. And when we can no more deny or refuse the aggregative force of heterodox practices and thoughts; strange and disturbing but no less present in ordinary life. It is this (re)emergence of paradox which calls for a daring heterology.

Rebelliousness of thought in accord with rebellious lived experience, of the *vita ipsa*, that life itself, source of all the repeated generousities which, however strange or disturbing they may be, are there like so many 'immoral *ethics*' securing the foundation of a being-together in gestation.

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The 'good government of minds' requires that we should be on the lookout for this kind of gestation. On pain of being out of step with the collective imaginary, which is likely to be far more disturbing than the most disturbing aspects of life itself!

The object of Michel Foucault's study, and its prospective aspect, lie precisely in the fact that he managed to put his finger on the 'threshold' of modernity. How, from that threshold, there occurred, in his own words, that amazing '*emballement*' (runaway movement) that was the universality of western discourse.

Perhaps it is in fact the opposite that we should think. Another 'threshold' is being reached which may allow us to understand that what profoundly influences social practices is above all the particularity of specific values, and the aggregative force they cannot fail to provide. That is what it is important to think, even at the cost of the destroying of our comfortable and somewhat soporific theories.

The term 'episteme' means being in the right place in order to see clearly what is obscurely experienced. Knowing how to express that *art de vivre* that is living together. The eternal problem of Archimedes' point, the methodological lever that lets us grasp what is happening to mores at a specific moment in time, given that they are not eternal but obey local specificities that are deep-rooted and develop rapidly. 'Truth on the other side of the Pyrenees is falsehood on this side!'

That is what G. Simmel pointed out in his time. The nature of life's instability is to produce *forms* and destroy them. In doing so it transcends itself. A fertile paradox if ever there was one! The 'form' comes into being (values, customs, organizations, institutions, and so on), but if it wants to remain alive it must develop by destroying what it has created. The dialogic of the *pars destruens* and the *pars construens*. Destructions and constructions go together. And the art of knowledge is in fact the art of adjusting to the *art de vivre* that depends on that dialogic.

Morality as it developed from the 18th century – universal, applicable everywhere, compulsory – is a 'form' governing what Simmel calls the coexistence of individuals based on 'reciprocal action'. But in the logical follow-up of the Judeo-Christian *salvation economy* this gradually became purely quantitative. So life came to be entirely determined by 'weighing, calculating, reducing qualitative values to quantitative ones'.¹

It was that reduction which came to usher in the worldwide domination of King Money, the predominance of productivism and the development of the consumer society. All things relying on the categorical imperative of a morality of work that leads to the self-fulfilment of the individual and domination of nature from which, according to divine injunction, human beings 'in sorrow will eat' (Genesis 3, 17).

Here we are at the heart of the moral 'form': the relationship of domination over themselves that subjects have to establish, the basis of the relationship of control which those same subjects must have over the object they are to subdue. This is the underground spring that has invisibly sustained 'modern' social life. That is, a being-together which in the end is rational, with predictable effects, in short directed towards a *salvation* to be acquired in the distant future (whether heavenly or earthly). It is in that sense that the economy of salvation leads to the economy strictly speaking.

We do not need to go over the subject again. There are many analyses in various

fields that have shown the close connection between chosen instrument and the salvation (Paradise, a comfortable existence, comprehensive insurance, and so on) resulting from it. On the other hand, we might wonder whether the cycle is not in the process of coming to a full stop. Whether a tired fossilized 'form' might not be in the process of being replaced by another that relies less on the relationship of domination (of oneself, of the world) than that of an *adjustment*, a reconciliation. An ethical relation indeed, where the qualitative would find new strength and vigour!

To draw attention to this inversion and the many 'signs' hinting at it, people increasingly often use the word 'societal'. Personally, when I suggested using it (*La Violence totalitaire*, 1979), it was to emphasize the unforeseeable nature of collective existence. In particular to stress the importance of the imaginary, the playful, the dreamlike, everything that was not part of private life, but was cause and effect of public life.

It may be possible to go further and, so as to bring out the end of a cycle, what I have called the dialogic of destruction and construction, focus on what is 'epochal'. The emergence of another epoch when the moral quest for salvation, in its accounting or quantitative aspect, is tending to give way to a qualitative relationship where spending has its place.

What a strange return to mythical origins. An attitude whose secret source, which of course, like every important phenomenon, is unconscious, may be seen, if I can say it in Heidegger's words, as the 'concern about being'. To be clear, not the quest for a precise *substance*: God, the State, the Institution, but something far vaguer, an in some way animal allegiance to life in all its ambivalence, a mixture of ups and downs.

That is what is active in the astounding vitality of groups of young people, the intensity of their actions, the violence of their passions, the puzzling, unpredictable aspect of their successive enthusiasms. Aesthetics is the essential word that allows us to grasp the *interplay of affects* summing up all that. Aesthetics in parallel of course with those plural ethics that can be seen at work in the *obsession* with music, the addiction to computer networks, the commitment that is as intense as it is temporary to humanitarian causes or other compassionate or charitable campaigns, not to mention sexual groupings according to various 'tastes' (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, etc.).

General morality is based on an 'ontological' conception of the world: phenomena, situations, identities that are intangible and sure of themselves. But these plural ethics are essentially changing and provisional. Still, rather than deploring this mobile, uncertain, non-institutional side of the phenomena in question, can we not see in it the expression of an authentic, full humanism, a conception of the human that is dynamic, explosive, precarious but intense? In short, life in its constructive but also destructive aspect.

Compared with a somewhat rigid humanism, of 'good souls', clear consciences, ladies doing good works in society, the cruel, generous *full-blooded humanism* of contemporary groups reminds us of the adventurous, uncertain, tragic side of every existence. Life that includes a fair share of death.

Whether the preachers and other guardians of knowledge like it or not, there is something Nietzschean in both the excesses and the ritual quality of daily ordinary-

ness: 'I, enigmatic beast, I, luminous monster, I, profligate of all wisdom'. When he said that, the audacious thinker saw himself as a 'daredevil [*casse-cou*] of the mind'. But it is indeed that daring, lived rather than thought or spoken, that we find in the tribal mimetism and the intense circulation of information peculiar to computer networks. The contacts they lead to are dangerous, the relationships thrown up may also be 'risky' (*casse-gueule* – a weak echo of Nietzsche's 'daredevil'), but they express well the innocent vitality of the *puer aeternus*, that eternal child who, without insurance, without the protective handrail of an established Truth, lives from day to day through the various enigmas of human existence. There is modesty and delicacy in that tragic experience.

These are descriptions that may appear surprising but they express well renunciation of the paranoia typifying the great political ideologies peculiar to modernity. Indeed it is not through this or that theoretical system that our relation to other people will be developed. Which explains, *de facto*, the prevailing tolerance as regards morals, lifestyles, ways of dressing or different sorts of behaviour that are expressed in the manifestations we self-consciously label 'ethnic'. They are essentially *homosocial* and spring from a very strong feeling of belonging. But at the same time, whether out of indifference or opposition, they accept that other ways of being and appearing may exist.

It is no longer in the political arena that this opposition or indifference are expressed but rather in a playful manner. Here we should remember, thinking of Caillois or Huizinga, that playful can also be *agonal* or feeling too giddy. There again we find one of the signs of the 'eternal child' myth which dismisses the judgemental or normative moral qualifications peculiar to the logic of politics. To use a popular expression, being 'cool' with yourself, other people and life in general seems to be the sole instruction that is accepted in the collective structuring.

Being 'cool' is a way of articulating rejection of 'ontological' rigidity. But it expresses instead a sort of 'autogenesis': a person or group that is still in the process of formation. And supported by the ideas of certain naturalists, we can remember that individual or group ontogenesis is a recapitulation or repetition of phylogenesis.² By that I mean that indifference towards codes of rigid morality stresses that the childhood of the human race is still part of every group.

And so young people's attitude, the 'youth culture' which is often condemned in contemporary societies, is not just a generational problem, but an infectious function. Nowadays 'the eternal child' is an emblematic figure, just as the serious, rational adult, producing and reproducing, was in the 19th century. And it is this new emblematic figure that from now on is going to direct values towards more flexibility in judgements about good and bad. Hence the rapidly mounting relativism in the ways of living sexuality, the need to work, or responsibility as a citizen. The 'little groups' in every area only recognize as laws the rule they have invented for themselves.

It is impossible to fight against the Spirit of the times and the one that is blowing over postmodern societies, now like a gentle breeze, now like a hurricane, and carrying with it, if not protest, at least apathy towards leaders in thought or action, as well as towards their dogmas. Let us be quite clear: the *law of the father* doesn't cut it any more. There are many signs of this decline. Education in the family or at school

is infected by the crisis, political action and intellectual authority are noticeably destabilized, not to mention the so-called power of the media, which is being relegated to its true role as a pretentious irrelevance.

In short it is the vertical structure, the phallic one based on the *all-powerful Father*, that is being questioned. The biting satire of comedy programmes such as 'Les Guignols de l'Info' or 'Le Vrai Journal', the daring cynicism of magazines such as *Teknikart*, among others, bear witness to the fact that assumption of the single absolute typical of the western tradition is no longer accepted.

We recall Alexander Mitscherlich's thoughtful, prophetic analyses of the 'fatherless society' (*Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft*)³ which stress the evanescence of traditional patriarchal power. We have now come to the end of that path. A society of 'brothers and sisters' is tending to prevail. The conspicuous androgyny that appears in fashionable styles for men demonstrates that the dominant male has been shoved off his pedestal at the centre of the world. The human being has again become an enigma that finds it difficult to think itself, experience itself and show itself in the 'form' of a stable, fixed identity. And it is indeed that kind of impermanence, that kind of relativism that weakens the legislative body of which the Father is the guarantor.

Here we are at the heart of a real societal transubstantiation, a profound change where the growing control of a strong, confident self, even the critical mind, the power of morality that are its foundation, in short what used to characterize the *paterfamilias* role, is being given a rough ride. Empirical observation provides many everyday instances.

This explains the emergence of what I have called 'societies of brothers and sisters', *little groups* like those predicted by the utopian Charles Fourier, or various tribes if we adopt that more and more used metaphor. In each of these cases what is involved is the slippage of Kant's *categorical imperative* towards Ortega y Gasset's *atmospheric imperative*. A somewhat libertarian, or even decidedly anarchical, atmosphere where the ideal of the horizontal imitation of the Abbaye de Thélème, focusing on a hedonism of the moment, is overtaking a vertical pedagogy focusing on a projected future. Diversity of plural tastes is henceforth replacing the unity of centralized power.

At this point we can find some enlightenment in Hegel, who saw in the diversity of tribes the characteristic (for Germany) of a 'free nation', since the Empire had not got rid of that. He notes that at each election 'the princes introduced new restrictive conditions into the exercise of imperial power so that it was reduced to an insubstantial shadow'.⁴

What an acute remark about the insubstantial character of central power! A fine metaphor that can be applied to all those 'areas of temporary autonomy' that characterize the life of postmodern tribes in all fields. The dominant morality is nothing more than an evanescent shadow. Granted, it still exists officially. But it is relegated to the museum. People refer to it and visit it occasionally like a curiosity with a whiff of the good old days. But the cement binding the social body together gets its ingredients elsewhere. And that is precisely what we should think.

Indeed, in this environment a moralizing stance is no longer appropriate. And the strangest thing is that there are still plenty of intellectuals who are unaware of this

elementary development and are keen to play the part of *praeceptor humanitatis*, more often than not in a pedantic fashion and always arrogantly. The less they understand what is involved the more they take up a stance on everything and anything, and then their analyses trigger an uncontrolled itch to legislate.

For instance in France matters of dress, wearing the 'Islamic' headscarf or the similarly named beard and other headgear, are going to be regulated. When shall we see a ban on the too conspicuous 'string' or trousers that are overly baggy and leave intimate underwear too visible? And it is interesting to note that all these topics are subjected to instant analyses which, with few exceptions, call for laws to be passed to save the One and Indivisible Republic!

They are unsophisticated analyses insofar as they do not take account of the 'aesthetic' dimension of these fashions in dress. Of course with some of them the religious aspect should not be ignored. And in certain cases what is left of patriarchal power is being forcefully expressed. Nevertheless, for the great majority what is involved is the logic of attraction. And in accordance with that logic the 'headscarf' in question is combined with skirts slit to the thigh and fishnet stockings, all things that relativize the religious requirement.

Without going further into these examples for the moment, it is enough to note that this kind of *relativism* ought to encourage us to take care over nuance in analysis. To borrow a theme dear to Edgar Morin, in a complex society we need to understand phenomena in all their complexity. In this context, as I have already indicated, there is an infectious relationship between *substantialism* and *moralism*. The ontology common to them both is always searching for a 'supreme cause', the ultimate first. But what the observation, the phenomenological presentation, of daily life shows us is that everything is fluid and fluctuating. Which strictly speaking complicates simple causality.

Sociality, that of the 'world of life' (*Lebenswelt*), cannot be reduced to a social that is deduced by simple reasoning. To adopt the word that, according to Max Weber, characterized the community, what is involved belongs to the category of the *emotional*.

Emotionality evades moral injunction. It rests on an 'ante-predicative, pre-categorical basis'.⁵ The bodily theatricalities that are being lived out every day in rituals of dress, or expressed paroxysmally in the many urban 'parades', emphasize an '*ordo amoris*' (Max Scheler) in which a strong feeling of allegiance is to the fore. The communal ideal needs external symbols, shared images, to express the strength that structures it internally. But the vitality of these archetypes – an unconscious drive if ever there was one – is very often expressed *anomically*. Myths, tales and legends are shot with shadow. That dark part is found in 'work' on the contemporary body. And the success of tattoos and piercing, like that of Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings, deliberately invalidates value judgement and moralizing analysis.

Indeed, there are some difficulties for the modern intelligentsia in being satisfied with a *de facto judgement* – stating what is, what can be seen, what can be 'imagined' – accustomed as they are to measuring good and bad based on what is called the 'fantasy of the One': One God, One Truth, the Purpose, the Meaning of History, and other capital letters that ignore the plurality of things human and the polytheism of values. There is difficulty in grasping the consequences of a re-emerging '*ordo*

amoris', the impact of a Dionysian atmosphere whose fringes are tending to spread further and further out.

We should recognize that there is in the ambient imaginary and presentism a vitalistic drive combining the material and the spiritual. The intellectualism or rationalism which is still dominant, at least institutionally, has always tried to separate the different spheres of human nature. Faithful to the biblical command (God separated the Light from the Darkness) reason is afraid of this *holism* where the different sides combine harmoniously.

But the specificity of organic life is based on the richness of that combining. And so, just as the 'spirit of the wine' continually relates to matter (soil, grape variety), there exists a subtle alchemy between work on the body – dress, fashion phenomena, heightening of differences – and the formation of a common spirit, an *image connection*.

It might even be said that in the interstices of appearance there occurs an experience of collective being. What bubbles to the surface, like an ideogram, is an archetypal unconscious with which everyone is in communion. The sign becomes a symbol and makes the other side of things, the immaterial, emerge.

It is that subtlest and most mysterious of alchemies that evades what Paul Valéry called the brutality of the concept. Obsessed with its '*deprofundist*' search for a so-called depth, an essence of reality, a 'noumen' beyond the phenomenon, it does not see, in the efflorescence of what is, the mark of a pleasure and a desire for being-together through what is there to be seen and so there to be.

In a number of his analyses Karl Jaspers refers to 'existential communication' as the foundation of all culture. I would add that it is always *anomic* in its founding moment. It contravenes established norms, it often returns to ancient values. It is shocking, even provocative, in that it no longer obeys the commonly accepted rules of social life. But without wishing to canonize it a priori, that kind of anomie cannot fail to be instructive for those who see lucidity as a mark of nobility of mind.

The return to the organic in the life of our societies, that is, that conjunction of contrary things such as soul and matter, calls for *organic thought*. By that I mean a phenomenological attitude that takes images into account and can qualify before legislating. Because concern for exact naming is, as we have long known, the very basis of necessary social organization. But this cannot be done against the grain.

As Chinese wisdom tells it, Tseu-lou said to Confucius: 'The lord of Wei is proposing to appoint you to government. In your opinion what is the first thing to be done?' 'The essential thing is to get the names right.'⁶ That underlines the importance of the correct use of words. Most precisely as regards the government of minds, that is, the ability to adjust to the state of values. That ability is always somewhat magical. But it alone gives its true legitimacy, its spiritual value, to any authority, whether it be political, economic or symbolic.

To speak colloquially, 'fitting in' with the spirit of the times now requires that we distance ourselves from the dominant *doxa*, that more or less scholarly 'opinion' which is basically motivated by caution or cowardice. 'Turn over the oyster' advised Plato (*Republic*, 521c), a revolution in looking that may be able to understand without prejudice the importance of the contemporary effervescence and measure its effects.

Which implies that we manage to break with what might be called modern 'Pelagianism'. The monk Pelagius, who denied original sin, may be considered, whether we know it or not, as the founder of the rationalist teaching that gradually came to the fore in the social organization of the western world. He was therefore the founder of moralism and social conformism, for which the dark part of human nature, the one that appeals to sensitivity, is inevitably going to be transcended.⁷ A pedagogic moralism which turns society, and all its spiritual institutions – university, press, publishing – into a huge *factory* of workers in the service of an entrepreneurial ideology dominated by a ubiquitous utilitarianism/ritualism.

And this utilitarianism is something that no longer seems to be accepted without debate. The experience of living goes beyond simple commercial, quantitative logic. Official 'Pelagianism' is answered, subterraneously but obstinately, by a sort of cheeky quietism. Indeed that is what is being expressed by sporting the headscarf or showing off navels and bum cheeks. In these kinds of provocation, which are seemingly opposed but in fact very similar, is the expression of a rejection of a solely commercial rational world. The expression of a non-conformity, sometimes unconscious but sometimes well controlled. The desire to stop obeying a logic of *separation* but instead to understand reality as a whole. Where image therefore has its place.

The specific ethical systems created by this kind of non-conformity connect material and spiritual values. And, as at other stages of cultural effervescence, that creates a sort of *magical realism* that leaves most social observers at a loss, 'theoretical people' (Nietzsche), who find it hard to grasp the festive side of life in its embodied aspects.

An embodiment we also find in religious fanaticisms, as well as the indulgence in the senses at all the celebratory occasions loved by the various postmodern tribes. In each of these cases there are actual '*courtship displays*' with a strong friendly element, in which sexual attraction plays a large part. It is almost in terms of smell that we should raise the social issue, secretion is that important. In the veiling or unveiling of the body we see more or less frenetic dances through which everyone works to communicate in a *being-together* experience.

It must be said that, thanks to the shared image, such *mystic copulation* largely evades moral judgement. It challenges an essentially contractual vision of the world since the rational self-governing individual, the protagonist of the modern 'social contract', also tends to disappear, one could say 'be consumed', in the community on which he depends in every respect. The moral ideal is well equipped to manage the rational individual. It is powerless against the (re)emergence of tribal imaginaries.

This is a reorientation we need to take note of: the collective soul is tending to prevail over the individual spirit. In various ways we have been able to demonstrate the close relation between Cartesian rationalism and the *logocentrism* that is its consequence.⁸ That sovereign 'I think' constituting the self and the world and fabricating society seems to be drowned in a 'superego' of ecstasy.

The exacerbation of the individual body in the hiding-place of a collective body relates to another form of the social bond with a strong *logocentric* element. Indeed it is space that prevails. The space of the body itself that is worked on at leisure, dressed up for prayer, adorned for pleasure, mutilated for a painful ecstasy. The territory of the tribal body that one tries to conquer and defends against all forms of

intrusion. In every case these are symbolic spaces generating and supporting the place. This is what might be called 'image connection'.

I have often pointed out this slippage from logocentrism towards lococentrism, remarking that there are periods when *place forms a link*. It is a reorientation that calls for a non-judgemental attitude, for us to go beyond our habitual tendency to analyse in terms of 'good' or 'bad'. It should encourage us to note how phenomena that may appear anomic, and which definitely are compared with established norms, may be considered as the surest pointers towards a new sociality in gestation.

It is not the first time that such pointers appear significant. Among the multiplicity of historical examples we may recall when art historians or philosophers of religious life analyse the Cîteaux monks' rebellion against what they saw as the relaxation of Cluny Abbey's rules, they point out that 'order of forms corresponds to order of the spirit'. And calling for a new communal ethic the Cistercians would create new 'forms' where this ethic might flower.⁹

An ethic that was closer to nature, to the simplicity of relations, a 'connection' renewed and purified by going beyond the artificial laws coming from institutional rigidity and complexities. An ethic whose ambition was to restore the original fervour and the edification of the monastic body in order to realize the monastic vocation. And an important 'symbol' was that this would occur by wearing a new 'vestment' thus signifying the planned mystical union.

In its strict sense Cistercian art is a new *culture* contrasted with an impoverished *civilization*. Henceforth architecture, decoration, appearance are so many expressions of a common spirit and a being-together still and once more alive.

Lessons can be extrapolated from that example showing that every new beginning is a *transfiguration*. It calls for other figures in which the communal ideal can be recognized and take pleasure. It is easy to see how contemporary practices obey a similar logic. The 'forms' they use may indeed be transgressive, but they are nonetheless foundational if we can recognize them for what they are and not for what we would like them to be.

If I refer here to a religious example it is because it is indeed striking to see that these new forms of sociality on the one hand are steeped in the intensity peculiar to religiosity and on the other express an overflowing intensity in the relation to others and that is because of the shared images. Intensity and density which, as *presentism* requires, are as real as they are ephemeral.

The 'contemplative' attitude prevailing over the political impulse peculiar to preceding generations, the fact that intuition in social relations is replacing deliberate groupings (party, trade unions), the fact of promoting all opportunities for 'being carried away' (festive raves, various effervescences), all this is creating a specific atmosphere in which the substantial subject that was familiar to us in western tradition is no longer very important. The subjective is tending to give way to the 'trajec-tive' (G. Durand). That is, direct *knowledge* of the intimate connection between all things.

A holistic correspondence, an intuitive link with others and surrounding nature, all that is expressed, to put it trivially, in the fact 'of being transported', 'being blown away' or feeling the 'vibe'. There is a long list of phrases that express going beyond a discursive logic, and stress the calm violence of the vital flow. Of course it is

possible to be offended by it. Nevertheless, the *categorical imperative* of established morality is increasingly giving way to the practice of small freedoms in the interstices in which a form of joyous immoralism predominates. That is the '*ordo amoris*' (Max Scheler), the cause and effect of many societal ecstasies.

We might compare this to Bergson's intuition: moving from static to dynamic, closed to open, a routine life to the mystical life.¹⁰ Theoretically that clarifies all those empirical situations where the conceptual *formula* (political, social) gives way to the *operational* form. A communal form where everyone no longer looks for their singularity, no longer affirms their specificity, but tries concretely to simply unite with the object that belongs to them or that they belong to. A form stemming essentially from the image.

Islamic veil, Jewish kippa, Hermès scarf, Calvin Klein underwear, you could easily draw up a list of the many signs and marks that might be considered as so many manifestations of the feeling of belonging. Strictly speaking 'we belong' to the very thing we display as an emblem of recognition. A navel sexily exposed, religious circumcision and genital piercing promote ecstasies of communion. They are a few of the harmless or exaggerated rituals through which tiny contemporary tribes express their *elective affinities*. Through which they transfigure daily life, which is dominated by the logic of commerce, into a spiritual reality which, though it is sometimes concealed behind the mask of transcendence, is nonetheless always profoundly *human*: what I am experiencing with others here and now.

Embodied practices, and Embodiment that should be understood in its precise meaning: whether it is pleasures of the flesh or mortification of the flesh, the difference is unimportant, these are ways of repeating how important the individual body is in the context of the collective body. A *mystical body* or 'imaginal body' in any case that is no longer recognized by the mechanisms of rational abstraction but tends to be affirmed in the organicity of emotional groups.

By turning upside down the popular saying 'dress makes the man'. 'Dress', whether it is on or in the body, thus becomes a hieroglyph. A sacred sign giving entrance to a sort of *immanent transcendence*. The living stones of an immaterial temple where you 'feel' at home. A symbolic construction where every group forms a body. An actual or virtual home providing protection and assurance. Fans of computer games, who understand this, frantically search the internet for a form of communion and thus create communities no less 'real' than the social and so rational groupings offered by society. In this sense the avatars used are like so many marks on your own body that give entry to a collective body. In this there is often an undeniable 'addiction'. But it simply means a collective fever: leaving your mark on the tragic impermanence of society's given.

This invites us to follow the *trail* of contemporary tribal nomadic life, which is paradoxically composed of *rootedness* and exile. Of the desire to be and live *here* while longing for elsewhere. Should we not see in this paradox the bankruptcy of a rational morality of being assigned to a residence, an existence closed in on itself, and at the same time the emergence of a dynamic ethic combining opposites? That is what gives us food for thought. The body and appearance, reason and the thinkable, the intellectual and the imaginary.

When the Californian school at Palo Alto developed the notion of 'proxemy' it

was thinking, in the context of an ecological sensibility, of taking account of what is *close* but interacts with the *global* environment. A dual need including lived reality in the vast framework of total reality. There we find something like an echo of the notion of '*domus*' peculiar to ancient thought. The importance of the 'home' not being limited to the four walls of the house but assuming a meaning in relation to fauna, flora and surrounding relations. By a kind of magical or almost mystical concatenation the social bond is constructed symbolically via the appropriation of successive places.

The Spanish word '*inmediaciones*' describing the surroundings of a central point, an important town, is illuminating in this context, in that it shows that what is close by lives in osmosis, unmediated, contiguous to the town that gives it meaning. There is a kind of absolute *immediacy* between the various elements of a whole. A co-presence making each element indispensable and the whole specific or original.

It is this 'domestic' and this 'immediacy', that is, a way of interacting via successive contaminations, irradiations, that may help us to understand the slippage from morality to ethic. Whereas the former is somewhat abstract, rootless, the latter is above all embodied, *proxemic*.

If we refer to the etymology of the word, it is above all concrete (*cum – crescere*): it grows with what surrounds it. Henceforth the social environment has a meaning only in relation to the natural environment. It accentuates the space, the territory, the soil ... that allows it to be. Ethics as a lifestyle, a way of existing based on a place that is shared with others. So *culture* becomes particular and no longer has any universal civilizing pretensions.

From this viewpoint space is in some way a lived time. One of small-scale stories, one of moments (good or bad) that by successive sedimentations in fact make culture concrete: a shared memory, a physical bond. In this sense the domestic, or you might say tribal, ethic is an *ethic of situation*. Connected to a particular existence or place.

In various ways Heidegger drew attention to this '*Ethos*' as a way of inhabiting: 'ethics must say that it thinks the existence of human beings'.¹¹ We are very far from the moral affectation of the *good souls* bearing responsibility for the whole of humanity and tormented amidst the misfortunes of the human race.

An ethic of situation is more modestly, more humanely and so with more humility, a juxtaposition of daily rituals, creating a collective state of mind. It depends on a place, whether real or symbolic, and it is tormented by *concern* for that place.

And so, in successive circles, this ground, this earth, this world become important. They 'are of interest' because we are in them (*inter esse*). As Merleau-Ponty says, it is 'because I live in it' that I can take this world seriously. In that sense, in the ethic that is emerging, we are far from the atemporal and universal, but definitely at the very heart of a present humanism.

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. Simmel (1987: 567), and on 'reciprocal action' Simmel (1981: 93).
2. See in this connection the text by the Italian poet Pascoli (2004) and the references to the naturalist Ernst Haeckel, a follower of Darwin, supplied by B. Levergeois in the presentation.
3. Mitscherlich (1969); and see Hurson (2002: 144ff.).
4. Hegel (1970: 289, 308, 331); and see Tacussel (2000), Bey (1997).
5. See Durand (1969) – originally published in 1960; or Vallejo-Gómez (2004: 112). On the *ordo amoris* see Scheler (1996: 54).
6. See Granet (1968: 362), and the references to Karl Jaspers in Gens (2003: 380).
7. On this kind of 'Pelagianism' see Moulin (1984).
8. See for instance Janicaud (2003: 150) and Maffesoli (2004).
9. See Davy (1990: 71) – originally published in 1945; and Focillon (1938: 159).
10. Bergson (1932: 445); see also Scheler (1996). On 'connectedness', see Bolle de Bal (1996).
11. From Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, see Heidegger (1989: 151 – French edn); see also Merleau-Ponty (1976: 491).

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