

Introductory speech of the Houjarray Foresight Talks 2024

My brief intervention does not have any substantive argument but want to put some fundamental and rather philosophical reflections forward, that could help to provide a broader contextual background to the geopolitical discussions we want to have here at the Maison Jean Monnet.

I would like to mention 2 observations that struck me as most central during last year's meeting (2023) and which I used as the underlying inspiration for my observations:

- Reality blindness... (Hans Vanderloo)
- Urgent need to be faster, in thinking, in reacting, in making foresight... (Borges de Castro)

We all clearly know the successes and the failures of disembodied rationality, modernist-inspired liberalism, and Marxist-socialism, but those of long-term postmodernist crumbling influences, are rarely considered in public debates and study groups. However, their impact on the contemporary scene of everyday life takes such intense forms that it is essential to acknowledge the deconstruction of the static patterns and structures of the culture inherited from our societies. This means the collapse of any certainty about the nature of society itself and its institutions. Many studies and analyses have already been dedicated to this question, but most of them are limited to a descriptive study of the changes and come to reductive conclusions and judgments predominantly devoid of realistic interesting future perspectives. Alternatively, their prospects are merely constructed with the same cultural parameters that necessitated precisely this global cultural shift. In other words, within our institutions, there is a tendency to remain blindly focused on finding solutions to stated problems within obsolete frames of reference. This is coupled with an emphasis on the realisation of transmitted 'truths' in accordance with the principles of 'political correctness'. However, these dynamics are becoming increasingly outdated and fruitless. Consequently, there is a growing urgency for a change in mentality and a change in the way we think if we are to work towards a sustainably, peaceful and human-dignified future. (Here I sporadically think of the contrast between the linear thinking system of our Western culture and the cyclical thinking system of Asia; the latter tends to involve iterative problem-solving and adjustments based on the evolving interdependent context, which lends the economic system, for example, a much more flexible and creative underpinning).

We could label our current culture as one of Being in Transfer: Henceforth Our New Life Condition. But shouldn't we start focusing on deeper realities, on the nature of the concepts (e.g. liberty and democracy towards Artificial Intelligence and Politics) and the nature of changes? What are the mechanisms that lead to that transformation, and why are they being anxiously criticised by our established institutions? By what means can they be rightly understood, integrated or accomplished? What role can the sciences, the arts, etc. play in this process of cultural transformation, and - why not - what role could the tradition of our Narratives play, particularly in the field of existential and anthropological problems that are urging us to transform ourselves as a society, and that urgently need to be integrated into our consciousness and daily existence.

The current social landscape is characterised by a multitude of profound cultural shifts that are transforming our perception, interaction and comprehension of the world. These developments are largely driven by a number of factors, including the global decline of Eurocentric thinking, the exponential growth of deconstruction as a philosophical method,

the resulting legitimization crisis, and the proliferation of intellectual and economic marketplaces (in which the emergence of transhumanism becomes more and more a dominant paradigm with all the implications this dynamic entails). These developments have initiated a new era of intellectual discourse, challenging established worldviews and offering innovative perspectives on the human condition.

And recently, humanity suddenly appeared to have been plunged into the crippling, isolating pandemic of COVID-19, with the threat that this would not necessarily be a one-off. Indeed, we witness all kinds of cruel wars, increasingly alarming climate change, questions of new kinds of minorities struggling for recognition, the ever-sharpening problem of the issue of energy resources and distribution, the emergence of new economic dynamics and systems, and so on.

But the gigantic challenges posed by the unprecedented development of the sciences – which offer humanity a panoply of infinite new possibilities, thanks to the convergence of scientific disciplines such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and artificial intelligence – and the place of culture, philosophy, spirituality, ethics in this exponentially growing digital world, are urgent and vital questions. As a result, a distinctively different anthropological image is gradually taking shape, propelling humanity forward into this transformative era. The necessity for profound contemplation on the essence of humanity, coupled with the imperative for integration and action in the context of these novel realities, underscores the vital and existential significance of these transformations. This, in turn, calls for a re-evaluation of our stance towards them and a reorientation of our cognitive and experiential approach to the world. In this new reality, openness, courage, learning, resilience, interaction and collaboration have become indispensable (one might inquire whether Monet's vision did not already indicate this perspective). The established institutions that have been the bearers of our political, economic, and diverse cultural systems for hundreds of years, seems to have less and less strongly supported adequate structures, nor the designated mindset, to process, shape, and integrate into their own evolution the new insights, the new emerging consciousness, the new dynamics that are being born in an ever-increasing number of individuals all over the world. The reluctance or inability to embrace this transformation gives rise to the intensifying series of tensions currently observed between institutions and groups of individuals, as well as a growing polarization between reality and social-political conformism.

The issue that we are faced with at this time is one of awareness and choice. Do we, in the name of so-called 'political correctness', prefer to become increasingly dysfunctional as a result of a certain cognitive 'obesity' that provokes conformism and reality-blindness? Or, alternatively, could we endeavour to read and comprehend these signs of time, to perceive and grasp these changes not as a provocation, not as a personal or collective infringement, nor as a compromise, but rather as a challenge, a quality, a vital force, that propels humanity towards a peaceful and dignified future. For we should not forget that the ultimate goal of efforts to overcome innate limitations and problems is human flourishing, and this mission carried out by these changes is based on the deepest and most ancient aspirations of humanity, included these of our European Fathers, as Schuman and Monet. The incorporation of this extensive and intricate cultural transformation into political settings and contexts, including those in Europe, presents a multifaceted and evolving landscape, challenge established principles and thinking methods, requires urgent and serious study,

but create also new avenues of investigation, marking a period of intellectual pluralism in which the boundaries of human potential and the scope of knowledge are subject to ongoing redefinition.

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