

Claudia Bettiol

HEART AND ENVIRONMENT
Passion and rationality

The hot 2003's summer

INDEX

Premise

- 1. Sustainability**
- 2. The perception of diversity**
- 3. End of a dream**
- 4. Risk of living, Risk of Dying**
- 5. The True Environmental Issue**

Conclusion

To the little big Maria

*“What is essential is invisible to the eye
It's only with the heart that you can see rightly”*

(Antoine de Saint-Exupery – The Little Prince)

Premise

In the midst of this stifling hot summer, as rivers dry up and meadows turn into arid stretches of burnt grass where animals find no nourishment, where bone-thin cattle attempt to graze on fencing, vineyard stanchions, anything that appears even remotely edible, because the earth is parched, in this summer, the hearts of countless farmers bleed.

But the farmers' hearts are not the only casualties, as legions of young people, desperate to uncover the causes, find no peace. The capitalistic economy is undoubtedly one place to look, as is the socialist economy, not to mention the overcrowding of the planet, as well as el Niño and the anti-Niño, the cyclone and the anti-cyclone. Further factors are definitely the lack of a well developed environmental culture and the difficulty of changing our ways of life. A society based on consumption and the comforts of modernity will never achieve a revolutionary change in its habits without a major stimulus, without an element that can trigger the start of a new process: without a catalyst. An excuse is needed to set loose the tensions already in the air. Revolutions, be they social or cultural, require passion, not rationality. The element that sets

the upheaval in motion is always rational - the cup of tea at the time of the American revolution or bread in the case of the French - but the action must come from the heart."

For those people who love history and define our era as "the fall of American Empire" one could compare this statement with the "idleness of Capua" by Hannibal. One could quote Churchill – who defined as 'butter society' the apathetical attitude of democracies to Hitler's advance. Maybe this is true but it is certainly not the end of an era. For what concerns the environment - the troubles caused by climate and these caused by mankind – such as blackouts – could represent the basic element which may mark a turning point. If we succeed in sparking off passion again we could say that the 2003's summer will signal the beginning of an era.

Any way up starts from the bottom and different Theories of Complexity show scientifically the birth of creativity from the need to give solutions to apparently impossible situations. To quote and conclude the fore-mentioned examples, Capua made the Romans react and Nazism was defeated in the end.

In the question of the environment we have reached a crisis that may be the fertile ground for changes but only if we are able to read the direction of this new flow and identify the catalytic converters that can spark off revolution. Even the climatic disasters of the 2003's summer may not be enough to start this process of change. The planned blackouts in Italy and the forced one in USA and Canada, the waves of death in France are symptoms of the necessity to invert the tendencies of environment politics.

According to Schumpeter's¹ theory of 'creative disaster' we need a situation with, apparently, no way out to spark off creativity and find positive improving solutions. To reinforce this statement and to verify its validity in questions of environment we can take the case of biological produce. The market for these products was almost nil and they were considered niche products until 'mad cow' disease. Only then did the fear of CJD (Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease) hit the hearts of consumers and made them change their food habits. Today biological products cover about 30% of the total market, which is still growing. The effect of these changes reflect not only on the health of citizens but also give birth to a

new economy linked to biological farms, farm holidays, a return to the country by many young people and the re-discovery of bio-diversity and tradition.

But what has sparked off this phenomenon which seems to be unstoppable? Attentive observation shows it was the fear of disease: a fear not based on numbers, on commonsense, but coming from the heart. The cases of CJD were really few and even the cases of sick cattle alone would not justify this effect on our economic system without understanding that emotions towards a product are not guided by the head but by the heart.

In his wonderful book “The universe in a tea cup” scientific journalist C. Cole² illustrates some paradoxes in perception of risks that every person runs everyday. It is amazing how heavy smokers are horrified at the sight of a steak with succulent fat. Most overweight Americans worry about brain cancer caused by mobile phones (statistically a very low risk) and do not worry about junk food which is a determining factor in several forms of cancer, apart from heart and vessel disease. They should protest against fat and not against electromagnetic radiation!

This gap between reality and perception is the same that divides heart and reason. A gap that is increasingly perceptible through different languages - which increases as it evolves and thus feeds lack of communication and the inability to properly assess the dimension of the problems. Any dialogue, any agreement becomes impossible.

In environmental issues similar situations occur. Sometimes they succeed in sparking off passions against or for a cause the reality of which is irrelevant. Sometimes a rational assessment of the problem should be enough to provoke action in favour of a cause, but does not succeed in channelling this energy to solve real and truly dangerous problems.

This phenomenon is the same as that which brings some governments to promote actions supporting some social categories, knowing that the cost of a fair partition is much higher than its actual advantages. Communication not demagoguery is the point. It is a linguistic choice before a political one. Let us suppose that the percentage of people who benefit from a certain action is low but that these people

occupy a relevant space in the collective imagination of suffering³. Planning supportive action for this category can represent two points: to rationally resolve situations of unease and to emotionally establish some form of dialogue with the society.

Let us return to the environment.

If we keep to rational understanding of alterations in climate and look only at the concepts of high and low pressure in the African basin we could understand physical phenomena but we would not be able to intervene on its causes. If we look for rationality alone and we do not arrive at the heart of people, if we do not spark off passions, we cannot provoke any revolution that would be able to bring a solution.

Maybe it is not right to introduce the concept of breakdown. Probably the word perturbation or research of new balance would be more correct.

Even if everything appears to be a perturbation that is upsetting the climatic habits of the last centuries, it is difficult to imagine what disaster will bring about the disappearance of mankind.

Even if – without the Gulf Stream – Scandinavia would be under permafrost, in Algeria orchards may flourish again. We would only have to change perspective.

Even if we would have to get used to trans migrations again, to abandon certainties, to have the ability to face risks.

Even if summers may seem hotter, wetter or dryer or colder...

On the other hand, Albert Einstein once said: “I do not know for what reason the Third World War will be fought, but the Fourth will surely be fought for water”.

From the point of view of a geologist the news of a new ice age would be no more upsetting than that of an actress's new love affair. It is a question of scale. The survival of the species - anthropologists would say – makes us believe we are the reference point for life on the planet. Anthropocentrism. Our need for subjectivity does not make us see the past, nor the future. But if we use the length of our lives as a unit of time (forty years for people in the third and fourth world, eighty for people in the first world) we cannot feel the heartbeat of our planet. The Earth seen by a Martian, from a distance, from a star in a far-off constellation,

using light years as a unit of time – would be very different from what we see down here on earth's crust.

Who is able to feel the earth's crust? How many of us (in Italy) still walk 'barefoot in the park?'. Our body would be a perfect means to feel the pulse of life. Let us take deaf people as an example. There are great musicians who do not use their ears to hear sounds but the whole of their body to feel sounds. The case of Beethoven is well known but even today the famous Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie feels the vibration of acoustic waves with her body and is able to play magically with an orchestra and harmonize with choral groups.

It should not be necessary to be deaf to re-discover the communicative power of our bodies. Maybe we have to get used to feeling our surroundings with our hearts again, without being overwhelmed by useless fears of disaster, without the need to measure risk objectively. Mankind is still not able to rationally understand what is happening around him. Physics, chemists, mathematicians still cannot explain what happens on our planet. The Illuminist thought that everything could be lead back to motion but all scientific rigor falls before a simple question, what is a physical system? It is possible to extract a physical system from its context and observe what is happening inside us if we were completely external to the phenomena? Quantum physics explains how this is impossible. Therefore, if our interaction with the environment modifies the perception we have of it, we have to find the courage to go beyond Descartes and try to make subjective evaluations of the environment.

Observing from a distance, going to a star and banalizing the present as Pennac does – over the millenniums – our planet has had many life cycles that were born of massive disorder. From the analyses of the first pictures of the earth taken from satellites, which shoot above the atmosphere, scientists have clearly perceived how some parts of the world have changed.

For example, they rediscovered the course of the large holy river Sarasvati, in India, which dried up a long time ago. It ran in Thar, or Big Indian Desert, and along its ancient banks remains of bygone capitals: Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Mehrgarh.⁴ This river was the largest of Seven Holy Rivers of the Vedic civilization. In comparison the process

of drying up of river Po, in Italy, disappears! They saw the ancient trace of a grand river that crossed Sahara desert and that probably fertilized those areas. The presence of former lakes and seas. Spread over the world, from Egypt to China, everywhere – where centers of human activity once flourished – remains of majestic cities are found when sounding the depth of the sea.

Digging under glaciers in Alaska and Siberia we can find mammoth frozen suddenly while they were eating. Birches full of instantly frozen leaves. Greenland (the green land) was colonized in 980 ad and named after the richness of its nature. Later, a minor Ice-Age between 1300 and 1850 burried the green lands under ice. It is only after 1850 that the planet's temperatures have started to go up again.

When we look at newspaper files we can see that in 1975 many scientists panicked because the ice slabs on Mont Blanc had disturbing grown by 500 meters in a few years and polar ice had reached Iceland.

Mankind has survived and never before has our planet been so crowded nor have so many people lived so many years, have many of them suffered from problems caused by hyper-nutrition. It is true that economic lack of balance between people is bigger but it is also true that the trend of welfare is increasing almost everywhere and often only shortsighted politicians try to stop it. There are many governors who do not govern to improve the future but are only submerged in the present. Asphyxiated. The immanent can be understood even by small satrapies but in this way we risk closing a door on evolution and on sustainable development which involves agreements on long and short term interests as we will see.

In this light, present meteorological perturbations can be read as changes, while we are waiting for a new equilibrium, and not as the end of the world. Probably cities like Paris or Rome have disappeared. Few people remember Sargon of Accadia (2371-2316 b. C.)⁵, maybe the greatest king of all times. But we are still here feeling the heartbeat of our planet and trying to understand where we are going to.

We are not able so far to ask our computers the right question, in spite of the enormous progress mathematicians have achieved and the growth of the power of our electronic computer allowing us

unimaginable calculations. American writer Douglas Adams let – in his tetralogy – human being construct a giant computer in 10 million years and ask it “what is the purpose of the universe, life, and everything”. The computer starts working and, using all energy of the universe, it finally replies after 17,000,000 years. ‘I have the answer’ writes the computer, ‘but you will not be able to understand it because you asked the wrong question. The answer to the question ”what is the purpose of the universe, life and everything is forty two.”⁶

In the same way the description of original dates and situations involved forming part of the explanation on the process of climate and meteorological changes is so complex that no acceptable results can be obtained. The question of interaction between observer and the phenomenon observed – as highlighted in quantum physics has not completely been explained. Experts often declare frankly that they are not able to explain situations that difficult.

In his philosophy on probability (1814) the mathematician Laplace wrote: “Strictly speaking we can even say that almost all our knowledge is problematic and in the small museum of things we have the certainty of we know, even in mathematics, the principle means to ascertain realities - inductions and analogism – are based on probabilities therefore the whole system of human knowledge is connected with the theory exposed in this essay”.⁷

Where rationality does not reach, where the presumed strictness of scientific explanations is not enough, our heart can serve. Explanations become less technical but always because of quantum mechanics, and also because of neurology and cognitive sciences, our interaction with the environment may make us feel something that escapes complex mathematic calculus and our rational comprehension skills.

After a stimulus, physical systems which are removed from their point of equilibrium search for a new stability with a minimum of energy, just as the earth over its history has recomposed itself in new landmasses. Event if ancient civilizations have disappeared mankind has survived, and to the extent that the earth has never been so overpopulated, the trend of growing does not give any signs of reversal.

We live longer, healthier and have been able to colonise virtually every corner of our planet.

Therefore also today it has to be found a new points of equilibrium. Probably exactly the overpopulation, the increased welfare or the madness of those without conscience, is one of the causes of major disturbance. We are waiting for the moment when the people of enormous nations like India and China will fully use energy from non renewable sources and when we should start to share more or less honestly the energy at our disposal.

The black-outs of the summer of 2003 in different part of the Western world indicated that the demand for energy is bigger than its production and than its availability.

What shall we do? Rationality suggests to change lifestyle but rationality is not man's guide. If we were rational and choices were made by our brains we would not have wars of injustice. We would not need revolutions or rebellions to bring society back to a situation of a new equilibrium. If we were rational beings we would let an agency choose our partner instead of wasting time walking along the pavements of our towns, blushing at the gaze of admirers, catching their shy minks. When the evolution of certain societies takes them ever more frequently to ask help from middlemen, this may seem a form of regression to medieval times.

Experts agree that to decrease the energy deficit we need to work at two levels at the same time: production of new forms of energy and education on consumption. On the first topic it is most unlikely that everyone can present his or her point of view while the second level is delightfully subjective. To reduce consumption of energy most of us will have to change our lifestyle and introduce new attitudes respecting the environment, every single day. This means a real revolution a reversal of the message previous generations – highly energyvorous – left us; criticism of the promotional messages of big multinational companies; emancipations from obsolete models.

Revolution is a way for young hearts to criticise the social system former generations prepared in the hope of creating a better one. Darendhorf stated that every revolution hides a generational conflict. Everyone tries to build his or her new ideal world to live in and work to

achieve its realization. Those who do not fight at 20 probably will not fight anymore!⁸

Not by chance, leaders of a rebellion frequently became managers. Who is boss of his or her choices and ready to fight for them at twenty, will always do so. Even if his or her ideas may evolve or sometimes change radically. This is the case of many demonstrators of '68 who are now in key positions of our society. It was to be foreseen that from leaders of heart passion they would become actors of brain rationality.⁹

This phenomenon has been explained by researchers on sensitive intelligence and socio-biologists illustrate how in the most critical moments in life 'heart' comes before 'brain'. People who are able to 'live' their emotions and empathize with those who are part of a group of people that share an ideal have more possibilities to use this quality in other different sectors as well.¹⁰ Manifestations of young people result in a rehearsal where single people measure their ability to form relations with others. Real success through will arrive when this capability is integrated with education and culture (not necessarily ... by others) and a sense of discipline. To sum up, success will arrive by the equilibrium between heart and rationality, reason and passion, brain and emotion. The attitude towards emotions, the ability to take part in something, to feel lightheartedness for others becomes a meta-skill. Thanks to this skill we can exploit all our other qualities.

People who participate in public manifestations and who are courageous enough to defend their meanings, are not born only with leadership qualities but also with a social soul. The talent to feed and maintain friendship, solve conflictual situations, negotiate, to be good teachers. The best will be achieved only by subsequent intercession of reason, the capability of having clear thoughts and the will to construct one's destiny.

Young people who demonstrate in whatever form should be looked at with respect and attention because – following the considerations above – they could become the leaders of tomorrow. The reason for the demonstrations often is connected to environmental problems and this reason may be the keystone on which the future generations will build their vision of the world. Further on we will

analyse the idea of ‘enlarged environment’ and we will try to give an explanation for the birth of Green political parties and the natural interest for environmental associations: problems that once were designed to be only political.

Meanwhile, though, when we think of the environment many hearts bleed. Mainly those of many sensitive young people in all parts of our planet. It is unbelievable that all this passion is not used to build a different world but, above all, to spark demonstrations. It is easy to take people to the streets to fight injustice but we do not succeed in getting them passionately involved in positive actions. To direct passion towards the realization of dreams. Of course, voluntary work and social commitment are increasing but commitment with environment is still only evidenced on rare occasions such as the cleaning up of a wood or a beach and time is not ripe yet for continuity. Anyway many people enlist to take part, overcoming prejudice (in Italy environmental matters are one of the political points of extreme left wing parties).

Today young people will get enthralled by environment politics only. Their big political dreams, their ideals of the way to manage power (or the State which in many countries equal power) their dreams of democracy, and equality have disappeared. Their attention is focused on environment and the use we make of it: from energy to agriculture, from renewable sources to GMO (Genetic Modified Organism) from nuclear power to parks, from the cleanliness of beaches to the phenomenon of abandoned and ill-treated animals.

After 11 September we would have expected a new involvement of young people in politics, in a collision between cultures. Not between socialism or capitalism but between people with a different cultural history, with different habits. This has not happened. While at first souls were moved by the emotional impact of the Twin Towers disaster, the wish of building a new society has not been born in their hearts. The concept of a different society does not exist.

Many habits and traditions are being unified by the worldwide push of globalization¹¹. Colonization of multinational companies is proceeding at fixed steps and nobody has really any alternative models. No-global movements can also be included among the ranks of environmental protestors. The loss of a national identity has divided cultures

rediscovering local identities (also naming and distinguishing products DOP, DOC, DOCG, IGP...). Environment has a new cultural meaning as a symbol of a better society more to the point, healthier.

Sometimes the question of the relationship man/planet gets out of view and is directed towards the topic man/man, forgetting the Latin saying *homo homini lupus*. Losing contact with ecology, behaviors of Western societies have not changed and those of many Eastern civilizations resemble the European or American way of life, which is dangerous. The clamor of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has not succeeded in overtaking the political ab-use and young people who demonstrate for the environment have not been influenced by those issues but risk to go further afield.

If we want to help the Earth to find a new equilibrium we will have to think of a revolution and not a simple technical solutions of small impact whose effects could pass unseen. The issue of the environment must be made part of a broader cultural debate on mankind, searching to remove certain topics from the strictures of ideology, so that a wider-reaching treatment of the problems at hand can be opened up to all those who wish to dream without filters on their yearnings and desires.

1. Sustainability

*Being immortal is an easy matter:
apart from Man, all creatures succeed,
because they have no idea what death is.*

.....

*In human language, there is never any conceit
that fails to take in the entire universe;
to speak of a "tiger" is to speak
of the tigers that gave birth to it,
of the deer and the turtles that it devoured,
of the pastures that fed the deer,
of the earth that was mother to the pasture,
of the heavens that brought the earth into being.*

(Jorge Luis Borges)

The word sustainability should be banned on account of the erroneous uses to which it is put. It is paraded forth for every sort of situation and exploited for every possible end, often without the slightest knowledge of its real meaning. Leaving aside any in-depth semantic analysis, it is still important that an accepted meaning of the term be arrived at, as otherwise its distorted use in drawing room conversations and at political rallies becomes a foregone conclusion. When all is said and done, the word has a very pleasant sound and does an excellent job of lending harmony to phrases, making it no surprise that it is used so often as a bridge between different concepts.

Robert Solow, a Nobel Laureate in economics, has come up with one of the more effective formulations for the concept of sustainable development: "The concept of sustainable development has taken on the

status of a slogan. An oft repeated commonplace that reminds us of how important it is, when we speak of economic development, to consider with great care the long-term consequences of the decisions we make today".¹²

But what exactly is sustainability? Among the definitions given during the 1992 Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro, one in particular struck me for the simple drawing that was used to illustrate it. As so often happens, a graphic transposition can make a given concept understandable to a greater number of individuals, even if they come from very different cultural backgrounds, helping to reduce the distance between heart and reason. "Sustainable Development" was referred to as a modification that, at one and the same time, results in improvements in the social, economic and environmental spheres. If an advance is made in only one of these three areas, then it is not sustainable. We should imagine an equilateral triangle whose points represent the three different types of concerns (social, economic and environmental): sustainable development is found at the figure's centre of gravity, meaning in a position equally distant from all three points. If we distance ourselves from that centre of gravity, we create an imbalance which, over the short or medium term, is likely to doom the initiative.

For when the focus is shifted towards economic concerns, what we are dealing with is a speculative operation, whereas excessive attention for the social sphere gives rise to a utopia. And should we draw too close to the environmental perspective, then change becomes practically impossible. For the environment defies rationalistic evaluation, nor, as things stand, do we possess sufficient knowledge to foresee its overall future development. Today attempts are being made to use the environment in the marketing strategies of certain products, through units of measure meant to demonstrate the economic effects of such products, as opposed to others, and to quantify the level of environmental respect. But this is not enough. Reflections can also be formulated, after the fact, on the economic consequences of certain ecological catastrophes, such as the sinking of the tanker *Prestige* off the coast of Galicia, between Spain and France. Insurance and reinsurance companies are particularly adept at such exercises, given their interest in

quantifying environmental disasters. But this is not enough. Nor can we simply delegate the task of qualifying and certifying the repercussions of an ecological disaster to financial operators.

Economic concerns will prevail over environmental ones until such time as the environment gives rise to a different type of interest backed by a logic of its own and not tied to market factors. The shipwrecks of oil tankers occupy the attention of the general public for the time it takes to clean the worst of the oil off of the gulls, and then such events disappear, preserved only in the memories of the young people involved. Because the emotional impact of these environmental catastrophes is intense.

Thousands, sometimes millions of young hearts take part in volunteer operations to clean the spilled oil from the beaches, and the vision of the disaster witnessed by these young people could alter their inner lives forever, while, without volunteers, there would be no way to keep the damage under control. Were a government to try and do so, the costs to its budget would be too high to bear. Only the emotional passion of young hearts can make up for budget restraints.

Looking at the etymology of the word emotion (from the Latin *e-moveo*: moving from), we understand why emotion is tied to action, to the need to find an outlet for one's sentiments. As the individual grows, the series of substructures created by education, experience and culture can dampen the power of this emotional impetus. According to scholars of emotional intelligence, the capacity for emotion is a powerful driving force, enabling individuals to act through self-motivation, to carry out heroic actions that entail a rigorous working regimen. Volunteers are capable of working non-stop for days at a time, practically eliminating their primordial physiological needs.¹³

What other force has such a deeply felt effect on the lives of young people? People fight and die for dreams. But what are the dreams for which young people in their twenties will fight? Why did young people from all over Europe come running to Galicia to try and limit the ecological disaster?

The dreams of many of today's young people no longer involve creating the perfect nation or the perfect society. The fall of the Berlin Wall swept away many dreams of justice. But dreams never die, and

those of today's young people are often tied to the environment. Urban wars (the clashes that occur inside of our western societies) are fought over GMO. The average age of those who took part in Italy's "merry-go-round" protests was fifty to sixty. The average age of those who protested at the Genoa G8 was twenty.

Environmental policies have the power to increase or decrease the level of dreams. The decisions of a Minister of the Environment or a Minister of Agriculture can have a greater effect on the future of many young people than those of a Minister of Education. Dreams forge individuals to a greater extent than school does. Dreams create heroes. In fact, it might make more sense to refer to the Minister of the Environment as the Minister of the Future or the Minister of the Generations to Come.

Were environmental issues to be addressed with the same mental outlook used to calculate the interest on bank loans, there would be no way of taking into account the energy give off by all the young people who, arriving from all different parts of the globe, find themselves fighting together for their dreams: in Galicia as in Genoa, in Seattle as in Nice. Throughout the world.

Given the pronounced age difference, we could say we are dealing with the emancipation of a new generation, with its initiation into adult life and the dawning of independent action on the part of the individual. The issue of the environment would thus constitute the climatic stage of a generational conflict. Looking at a street demonstration, at any of the protests that arise in any of the world's countries on the occasion of any meeting of any international body having to do with economics, a striking difference in the ages of the opposing sides can be observed. On the one hand we have the generations that have reached power, that have their hands on the levers of control, and that are trying to organise administrative and social structures capable of governing relations in the areas of economics, trade, labour etc. between the world's inhabitants (UN, WTO, NATO, WHO, FAO,...). On the other hand, we have young people who could be their children, and who, apart from environmental issues, are searching to assert their identities through a full-fledged clash, nothing

less than a revolution: a rite of initiation to be preserved as a memory and utilised as a symbol.

The average age of these young people is twenty, only rarely do they prove to be any older. This is the age at which it is necessary to shout in order to hear one's own voice. They know of no other method, nor do they believe any other approach would be ineffective. Emotions are stronger than rationality.

This is why the term sustainability is hard to understand at age twenty. The achievement of sustainability inevitably leads to a negotiated form of its three constituent elements, to a mediation of pulsations that makes no sense to the heart, but must be understood rationally.¹⁴ Choices must be made, options discarded, including some that might appear interesting but would render the desired development unattainable. The problem is that the heart has a weakness for dreams and utopias. At age twenty, no one wants to hear about mediation, preferring drastic, clear-cut choices in favour of the ideals that thrill the soul. How can subtle shadings be perceived when the world is seen in black and white? If you decide to challenge the world, then the challenge is all-encompassing, no holds barred. How can any limits be accepted?

Sustainability between three distinct areas of concerns (environmental, social and economic) can be reached only with the assistance of specialists in negotiation and conflict management. New figures enter the game, virtually ascetic participants whose role is to establish a dialogue between heart and mind, between reason and sentiment. But this is unacceptable at age twenty, when the idea is to bring about change by oneself, to be able to turn the world around through one's own effort and commitment. Enough talk! Words are seen as a negative weapon working to the advantage of verbal experts whose task is to deflate hearts. Mediators are seen as the messengers of reactionary forces of evil, hostile to any change or new development.

Evolution and growth are marked by the alternating occurrence of these two stages: observation of the changes underway and protest, on the one hand, and subsequent attempts to modify the context, on the other.

These alternating stages correspond to the alternating predominance of heart and rationality, a cyclical process well known in

oriental philosophy: the Yin and the Yang. Looking at the symbol, when one of the two portions reaches its maximum expression, it already contains signs of the start of the new cycle.¹⁵

The risk is that the generational clash foreseen by Darendhorf will become ideological, taking precedence over the dispute in environmental issues and creating a situation in which these courageous hearts fail to modify not only the habits of developed societies, but also their own. The risk is that, once there is no longer any excuse for protesting in the streets, the waste of non-renewable resources (meaning the energy of those hearts) will persist among those young people, who, otherwise, could prove capable of starting the construction of a new society.

Further evidence that generational considerations are likely to prevail over those tied to the environment is provided by the street protests over pension reform. In theory, the question of the economic imbalance created by the excessive social costs of lifetime benefits at more or less elevated levels should be of concern primarily to the young people whose labours must sustain an increasingly large mass of individuals. And yet the average age of those attending such encounters, as was also the case with the “merry-go-round” protests, is quite high. The overriding theme becomes one of vested interests, rather than the rights of the generations to come. A resigned fatalism has taken the place of dreams. The logic is that of the shipwreck survivor who, rather than abandon the rock he clings to and search for an alternative, challenging both the world and himself to find a change that will save his life, simply stays put.

This very attitude is studied by risk analysts, who explain that individuals, though more than willing to face risks to keep from losing something, prove incapable of taking on these same risks in order to obtain future benefits and gains. For the same reason, people find it difficult to invest either their own funds or public financing in programs of preventive medicine, even though it is well known that prevention generally costs a good deal less than treatment.

Another way of describing the conclusions of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference is to observe that sustainable development proposes

a new approach based on placing responsibility on all the different parties involved: political authorities, citizens, businesses, environmentalist groups, holders of various interests, banks... "Achievement of the desired balance between human activities and development, on the one hand, and protection of the environment, on the other, calls for a clearly defined distribution of responsibilities with respect to consumption and conduct affecting the environment and natural resources. Two additional elements necessary to achieving this balance are dialogue and concerted action among the parties involved, seeing that their priorities, in the short term, may differ".

It is no accident that, after the Conference, the European democracies started responding to these demands, acknowledging that the time had come to establish a system capable of increasing the democratic participation of citizens in decisions, not only in the area of urban planning, but also with regard to social concerns and economic issues. Labour unions are called on to express opinions regarding all government decisions. Students are asked to judge their teachers and their schools. The number of public referendums multiplies, to the point where the quorum needed to make the votes valid can no longer be reached. And this occurs not only nationally, but on the regional and local levels as well. Only obsessive followers of the news can possibly know that a referendum in Sardinia to block an increase in the number of the island's provinces recently failed. In the 1800's Manzoni wrote "for only twenty-five readers"; today's referendums are held for only twenty-five voters.

But to return to environmental issues, it is worth examining developments in Italy in the area of urban planning, a discipline that studies the ways in which changes are made in the physical territory, meaning, for all intents and purposes, the environment.¹⁶

Up until the nineties, the system was fully planned and managed by the various administrative structures with responsibility for the sector, running from municipal to regional governments, in a sequence of mandated powers. The decision-making process could last for a number of years and generally took more than five. In the course of this formidable lapse of time, the space reserved for "observations" by citizens regarding the choices of the decision-making oligarchies was

only a few days, generally a couple of months or so. And not all the inhabitants of the territory affected were provided with this opportunity, but only the owners of plots of land damaged by the decisions.

Starting in the mid-nineties, first the Central Government, under a law establishing the so-called Integrated Plans, and then, at popular insistence, the Regional Governments, began stipulating alternative procedures for reaching decisions on urban development and thus the new make-up of the territory.

These programs were named with a variety of picturesque acronyms, depending on the scenarios in which they were implemented, but they were all structured around a number of fundamental concepts: in-depth negotiations between private parties and public administrations, plus the wide-scale sharing of decisions with all holders of interests, meaning the stakeholders.

The negotiating phase took place on various operational levels, including traditional planning, economic programming and the management of actual initiatives. The underlying goal was to arrive at sustainability by following the recommendations of the Rio de Janeiro Conference. The mediated interests were reconciled with the widespread interests of the public by having the management of the works included under the negotiating process, or rather by expanding the timeframe of relations between the public and private interests, in order to compensate for what could appear to be imbalances over the short term.

The negotiations through which this can be accomplished prove to be complex, involving a large number and a wide variety of parties. Seated at the same discussion table can be businessmen, professionals and representatives of public administrations, but also insurers, bankers, project inspectors and risk assessors, attorneys specialised in civil law, experts on administrative affairs and urban planners.

At times the decision-making process takes only a few years, but it the negotiation phase alone, during which the plan for the transformation is defined, takes up roughly half the time. This is an unmistakable sign of the ongoing development of democratic forms, of democracy itself, if we stop to consider the second distinguishing characteristic of all these complex plans: the role played by professional

and special-interest groups and, therefore, by environmentalist associations.

The possibility of taking part in the planning process has been extended to the full range of stakeholders, meaning to all those who, to varying degrees, represent the interests of a group of individuals. Each of us, in theory, can ask to be heard with regard to any program of territorial transformation.

Of course, democracy is not without its obligations, and participation calls for a commitment, a voluntary decision to set aside a portion of one's day in order to take an interest in the plans that others are drawing up for us. The abstention from referendum voting demonstrates that, once the initial outburst of participation has died down, collective interest tends to drop, being replaced by indifference or, worse yet, a use of the procedure for improper ends.¹⁷ And so the Island of Sardinia is divided into provinces with populations the size of a single city block in Rome.

In order to revive interest in taking part in decisions, a number of government bodies are developing increasingly elaborate, tightly focussed communications efforts. Even operators in the cognitive disciplines are attempting to come up with programmes of "soft education", straddling the dividing line between communications and structured information.¹⁸

But if people's hearts are not touched, if their emotions are not triggered (*e-moveo*), then there is little chance of reversing the trend towards apathy, at which point the verbal approaches used by administrators will only contribute to increasing the distance at which citizens keep themselves.

2. The perception of diversity

*The strong wind does not blow all morning long;
Nor does the driving rain fall the whole day through.
Were they not created by the sky and the earth?
If the sky and the earth, with their strength,
Fail to sustain violent activity at length,
What can you hope to do?
....*

*Do not conquer the world by force,
Because force merely generates resistance.
Thorns blossom where armies tread.
Years of want and need follow a great victory.
Do only what needs to be done,
Without resorting to violence.
....*

(Lao-Tzu, from the Tao Tê Ching)

If the term sustainability is difficult to comprehend and accept at the age of twenty, how do things stand with the idea of negotiation?

Negotiation also refers to the capacity to establish dialogues between cultures: the Arabs with the French, but also the lawyer with the engineer. Once, shortly after receiving my engineering degree, I was to build a floor platform of solid wood planks, based on a design with a dual framework whose portions were set at a ninety-degree angle to each other, as a seismic precaution. I went with a draftsman, a friend of the

family, to see a carpenter, and, using the simplest form of conversational Italian at my disposal, I explained how he should cut the wood. When we left, just a short while later, I was confident that the very next day I would be able to start building my platform.

Outside of the carpenter's shop the draftsman asked me: "Do you think he understood?". Without the slightest hesitation, I replied that naturally he had understood, for not only was the task quite simple, but the carpenter had nodded in agreement a number of times. "So you wouldn't mind going back in there and asking him to repeat the instructions you just gave him?", continued the draftsman.

The challenge struck me as pointless, but I took him up on it, convinced that I would win right away. But then I posed my question to the carpenter, and his eyes began to search the great expanse of the sky, as if he were hoping the words would arrive through divine inspiration. He had not understood a thing. Or rather, I had been unable to communicate to him any idea of what I wanted to do.

At that point, the draftsman explained that the secret is always to ask your listener to repeat what has just been said in his or her own words, being sure to use a shared form of expression with common meanings, as in the case of drawings. Even when what is being illustrated strikes you as simple, always use the universal language of drawing, which is capable of translating construction operations into any other language. In fact, a few years later, when I found myself at a worksite in the Caribbean, where the Indian immigrant workers spoke a slang that was terribly hard to understand, drawings turned out to be the only way of establishing effective communications.

In a recent essay on literary translations, Umberto Eco defined the translation as a process of negotiation between the meanings of the two languages, overseen by the translator, in the same way as negotiations took place between myself and the carpenter, under the supervision of the draftsman.

The formulation of a shared language is of key importance when seeking to establish relations between different individuals, just as the recognition of shared symbols plays a vital role in creating a group spirit and motivating hearts. We have already seen how an examination of the term solidarity brings into play a wide variety of figures tied to different

professions, ages, levels of education, social groups, genders, vocabularies and dreams. But each of these individuals must establish a form of dialogue with the others, not only so that they can understand each other, but so that they can set shared objectives. In the final analysis, the negotiation of objectives is the key element to a successful territorial transformation which avoids conflict.

The new forms of participation-based democracy also call for the identification of instruments and strategies of dialogue which the parties can use to establish an effective give and take, avoiding an excessive expenditure of energy, as well as the types of misunderstandings that can degenerate into disputes and conflicts.

We cannot help but notice that, when each person is defined as a distinct cultural subject, then the techniques that aid in establishing a dialogue are the same as those used by experts in intercultural communications.¹⁹ Once we realise that the difficulty I encountered in establishing a dialogue with the carpenter, or the problems that a lawyer will have in communicating with an engineer, or a biologist with a musician, are identical to what an Arab experiences when talking to a Frenchman, then we have no trouble understanding how vitally important it is to establish shared points of reference.

The sociologist Anzaldúa used the term "borderlands" to define the zones in which effective communication occurs.²⁰ We can think of them as zones where each of us is willing to trade our cultural symbols back and forth, together with their associated meanings, taking part in the ensuing give and take. If we picture each individual as being a circle, then only in the limited zone that overlaps with another circle can there be an exchange of information or discussion of ideas.

But just what is being exchanged? Words, or what would appear to be words, are actually attributions of cultural meanings. The term environment, for example, can accommodate an infinite variety of different meanings: the internal, external, natural, artificial or cultural environment; the limited, enlarged or working environment; or the habitat. Without agreeing in advance on a meaning, the communication cannot even get underway, because it would take place outside the borderlands.

The first step in avoiding such conflicts is to consider that, in reality, 90% of communication between individuals is non-verbal, taking place through body language and gestures that are perceived on the emotional plane. The process is referred to as being empathetic with the other person, from the Greek term *Empathia*, or "feeling inside", meaning the capacity to perceive the subjective experience of others.

When we have the sensation that the person with whom we are talking is lying, or when we feel ill at ease with someone, it is because we perceive that person's words to be out of synch with his or her emotions. And quite often what we feel turns out to be more accurate than what we hear. Proof of this is how we perceive the differences in emotion communicated by a mime much more rapidly and intensely than when we listen to someone talking on the radio in a flat or monotonous voice.

According to Hall, a distinction can be made between digital and analogue communication, depending on the cultural value placed on non-verbal signals. Non-verbal communication and the level of empathy are factors capable of highlighting moral judgments and perceptions of reality.²¹

Returning for a moment to environmental issues, we can state that, the greater the degree of empathy reached by human beings, and the greater their capacity to establish dialogues between different cultures and to intercommunicate, then the greater will be the impetus to carry out a just distribution of resources based on people's actual needs.

Back on the subject of young people who demonstrate as part of the no-global movement, it is only natural that their interests extend beyond the realm of issues strictly related to the natural environment, touching on the political sphere as well. The hearts of young people know how to reach a state of empathy with the less fortunate, such as those born in the more disadvantaged zones of the planet, to a much greater extent than someone who reads an analysis of the catastrophic situation of the Third World in a review. Passion, the use of the emotional component of the individual, can bring together individuals very different from one another and join them in a common cause. Especially if, in the meantime, common symbols, a shared language and recognisable cultural products have been established.

When the concept of culture is carried beyond the fields traditionally associated with the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, literature...), it enters sectors such as cooking, gastronomy, the environment, botany.... At that point the production of culture plays a central role in defining social groups and generating the elements that allow them to represent their members. Fragmentation grows, given the need to recognise increasingly small, specific groups, some of which come into being and then disappear as rapidly as the fashions through which they are represented.²²

Works of art become installations, transforming themselves into an experience for the select few who can contemplate them, without the ultimate goal of defeating time. Seen in this light, culture stands as the need to create meanings within a social context. And, for this very reason, once meanings have been created and assigned to different groups, there is very little hope of changing the resulting symbols.²³

Once the environment, or respect for the environment, has been cast in ideological terms by a given group, it is hard to see how another group can endorse the same values or respect the environment. In stripping away the ideological framework, consideration has to be given to symbols which cannot die, but must be shared and accepted by a greater number of people. A massive effort must be made to redistribute meanings.

One of the problems of the environment is that the natural overlapping of ecology with the realm of politics has led to the logical conclusion that, in this day and age, whoever is the first to transform their positions and their ideas into symbols holds an advantage that, at times, can result in a refutation of the legitimacy all those who do not belong to the group in question.

The only way to allow those who have been excluded to have a say once again, or to enlarge the original social group, is to create new cultural meanings that are shared, new flags (the most apt example of a cultural symbol capable of generating passion), as opposed to those employed to date by a small number of self-referential elements.

If the concept of spheres determined by individuals is transposed to the larger scale of a group to which individuals belong, then the illustration of the "borderlands" within which interaction is possible can

be maintained. In this case, the territories are populated less by words than by cultural symbols. The cohesion of a community, its sense of belonging to a group, is defined by its culture, together the forms of expression and symbiotic elements through which it manifests itself and the behaviour of its members.

It makes no difference whether the cultural cohesion is supplied by a football team, by a religion or by the environmental struggle. What matters is that the group be founded on the shared meaning of certain symbols that have become cultural objects. This is why the importance of the concept of a geopolitical community is on the wane, while that of shared symbols is growing.

The latest wars are all fought for cultural reasons. With the end of the Cold War, the ideologies whose task it was to create almost universally recognisable symbols have given way to the fragmented framework of micro-groups providing a sense of belonging. After the fall of the Soviet bloc, individuals could no longer identify with a central power, giving rise to the process of cultural fragmentation that is still with us, and that constitutes the other side of globalisation, meaning an attempt to identify which culture will prove dominant over all the others.

A search for any topic on Internet immediately illustrates that the primary process underway is a breakdown of reality, and not its consolidation in the direction of uniformity. There has been no instrument more powerful than the Web when it comes to erasing the geographic boundaries that once defined communities.

When my friend Sandro (who lives in Switzerland and is in the process of moving to London) and I e-mail each other on an almost daily basis, exchanging chitchat, we are doing nothing more than perpetuating the habits and cultures of our small hometown in the Roman hinterland, on the southern edge of the European Empire. The recipes we exchange are the outward manifestations of intercultural contaminations originating from the new relations we have established in the course of our separate lives.

For some time now, I have found myself pondering with increasing frequency the question of whether globalisation is a mono-directional process? Obviously the answer is no. But then, how does this exchange take place?

For while the influences of the Western world, or rather, the American world, are increasingly evident, it is also true that many of the West's cultural certainties have begun to crumble as boundaries have weakened.

The East is increasingly present, though quite often a superficial examination fails to detect this presence. The philosophies of the Far East (Indian, Chinese and Japanese) are having a profound effect on the rational structure of Western thought. In the case of the home, for example, we can point to Feng Shui and bio-architecture as disciplines representing two cultures whose point of contact is the definition of the meaning of the habitation and how it relates to its surrounding environment and to Nature. In this way, ancient traditions in danger of disappearing forever have been rediscovered.²⁴

But the examples of Feng Shui, Aikido and Taichi are not sufficient to provide an idea of the depth and the extent of the change that oriental philosophies have brought to our way of thinking. Fritjof Capra supplies an apt description in the Tao of Physics. The dual concept of the relativism engendered by crossing quantum mechanics with the natural spiritualism of the Orient is undermining Western thought, loosening it from its moorings.²⁵

The roots of our thought stretch back through the centuries, but we undoubtedly owe the underpinnings of our concept of man to the great French mathematician Descartes, founder of three-dimensional Cartesian mathematics and the thinker who formulated the phrase "cogito ergo sum". The foundations of our rational thought, the certainty that mathematics can understand Nature - which, in turn, can all be explained through mechanical equations - is his doing.

The certainty that the world has three dimensions, along with the exclusion of any non-spatial dimension from our attempts to describe reality, is traceable to him. The observer's indifference to the sphere of the physical, in short, man's abstraction above and beyond reality, is the work of Descartes. The groundwork for the concept of man as the super being and the lone thinking element in the world can be traced to him.²⁶ Rationality, the triumph of thought over feeling, lie at the base of Le Corbusier's phrase "The home is a machine you inhabit"²⁷, an outlook whose more or less direct consequences are monstrous residential

complexes, such as the Corviale Housing Project: not a home, but a parking lot for human machines bereft of feelings.

Not long ago, discussions on the limits of enlightened philosophy were the exclusive purview of exclusive clubs of somewhat "alternative" friends who had gone in for the nostalgic worldview of connoisseurs of the Orient. Then the new age movements came along, and it was seen that spirituality exercises a noteworthy allure on Western populations, even in cases where it lacks philosophical and cultural depth. The *Celestine Prophecy*²⁸ sold millions of copies, it led to the publication of a magazine, the founding of a group and a style. But it takes more than a book to change the life of a community as a whole. Today the discussion is in the hands of sociologists, philosophers, neurologists and specialists in the social sciences.

An increasing number of experts are in agreement on the fact that man consists not only of thought (I think, therefore I am), but also of an emotional sphere which plays an even larger role in determining our choices as we go through life (I feel and I think, therefore I am). Emotional intelligence is considered one of the keys to success in leading a balanced life, in finding solid grounds for decisions and for managing to overcome the obstacles and adversities of life. Piaget makes the distinction between seven types of intelligence, having lost his confidence in the highly rational I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient) tests for determining a person's capabilities.²⁹

The various types of intelligence include certain rational qualities of the individual (I think), but also skills in the management of interpersonal relations and in establishing empathy with others: gifts tied to the emotional sphere (I feel).

The individual is finally recognised in his or her entirety, in keeping with what the Oriental philosophies have held right from the start. The closing of the distance between West and East occurs through a process of both heart and reason, which is exactly what we are analysing in the field of the environment. The analogies run much deeper than can be imagined. The modes of thought are converging, and so globalisation manifests itself as a dual process moving along a single path: Coca Cola and McDonald's in exchange for philosophy. It is hard to determine who has the greatest influence over the long haul. However

a number of the symbols of the multinationals have risen to the status of cultural symbols, with their nearly ubiquitous presence seeming to provide proof of a Western domination of the world. The Coca-Cola logo can be found in Nepal, at the foothills of Everest, and in the farthest, most inaccessible reaches of the planet, while McDonald's hamburgers have invaded our cities, though this is only one aspect of the question.

In actual fact, it is well worth taking a look at the ongoing development of the image of McDonald's, a company with 30 thousand restaurants in 118 countries, 46 million customers and turnover of 4.2 billion dollars, but a 2003 balance-sheet which, for the first time in 47 years, finished in the red. The chain has studied a new marketing plan, and it is trying to revive its fortunes with a drastic treatment: restaurants presenting a radically new, ultra-fashionable look. They call it the "Plan for Winning", but the new strategy is focussed on the freshly minted slogan "I'm loving it", the underlying theme of the company's TV advertising. Definitely an attempt to reconcile heart with reason!

At the same time, precisely because of their symbolic value, the brands of the multinationals are the targets of the protests of the no-global movements. Today's conflicts are all tied to culture (be it high-brow or popular culture): whether in the Basque territories or in Ireland, in Corsica or in the former Yugoslavia, whether the troubles are tied to Islamic terrorism, religion or ethnic strife, the symbols being fought over are actually cultural symbols.

Naturally, related economic and political factors are always present, seeing that reality consistently proves more complex than any of its possible descriptions (Leonardo Sciascia was fond of saying that reality far outdoes fantasy), but men and their passions are triggered by cultural symbols.

3. End of a Dream

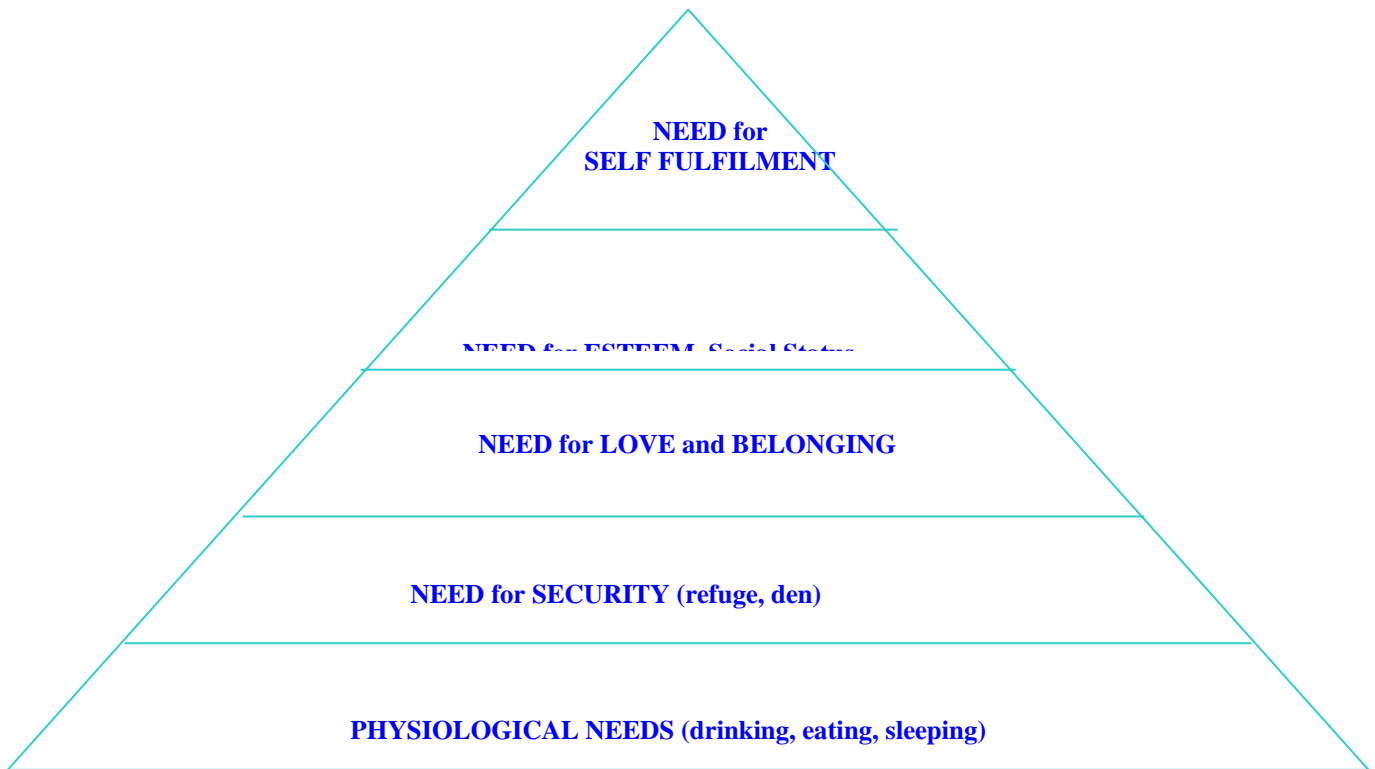
*“There are only two tragedies in life:
one is not getting what one wants,
and the other is getting it.”
(Oscar Wilde)*

At what age do we stop dreaming? How can we create new dreams, in order to feed our emotional need to strive towards an ideal?

My generation, the one born in the sixties, stands apart from those that came before it, because, for many of us, certain primary needs were satisfied a priori. We take it for granted that we will not suffer hunger, cold or other physiological needs connected with our earthly existence. We have not known war. The closest we have come to the horror of a bombing are tales told us in the gentle voices of our grandparents. The only hunger we know is that we inflict on ourselves in order to lose weight and become more attractive. Any problems we might have with cold or heat arise only when the furnace breaks down and the repairman charges an astronomical fee to fix it.

If we examine Maslow’s pyramid of needs, we could say that we all start from at least the second level, though many of us begin from the third or the fourth or the fifth.

Around the year 1960, Abraham Maslow, the founder of humanist psychology, in attempting to uncover the underlying motives of human behaviour, drew up a sequence of needs that traced the process of individual evolution and growth.



According to the founder of the theory, progress is made one level at a time, without the possibility of skipping a stage. Before moving to a need on a higher level, each of the needs below it has to be satisfied.³⁰ A number of scholars have updated this scale by making a distinction between individuals who belong to advanced civilisations and those who belong to civilisations with limited resources or to civilisations that have experienced rapid growth, but unaccompanied by the same level of cultural development.

The great writer Milan Kundera provided an amazingly effective description of this process of development, which almost every human being carries out in the course of his or her lifetime, in a passage from one of the stories in the book "Laughable Loves", where a person's life

is summed up with the words: an apartment, a wife, two children, a dog, a house in the country. Seldom has a metaphor been so apt!³¹

The different levels of Maslow's scale, representing man's needs, can be summarised as follows:

1. Physiological needs
2. Need for security
3. Need to belong
4. Need for self-esteem and social status
5. Need for self-fulfilment

The first level consists of bodily needs, which, together with the need for security, for a den or refuge, is by far the most widely felt need by the majority of the earth's inhabitants. At least this is the case for much of the population of the non-Western countries, whose economies have not yet reached the point where they can guarantee the individual a minimum level of wellbeing.

The satisfaction of these two categories of needs is the sole factor capable of creating the conditions for the development of the nations of the third world. Amartya Sen, a Noble laureate in economics, has pointed to efficient systems of public health and education as the minimal conditions necessary for achieving growth in the countries of the Third World. State support in these two areas provides individuals with the chance to develop and grow, even without other forms of welfare aid.³²

Naturally, issues such as the redistribution of the planet's wealth, the inequality of access to resources and political and social imbalances remain to be solved. But without freedom, there is no possibility of addressing these topics. And without health and education, freedom cannot be attained.

At the third level of the pyramid, the scale enters a more subjective realm, one not easily measured or quantified, being tied to our emotional sphere. The needs in question are related to belonging, such as the desire to have friends, to be part of a group, to love and be loved.

Many of the members of my generation started from this level, virtually unawares of the existence of the first two levels, which were

not seen as needs. This is why we find it so difficult to relate to the drama of a prisoner in Auschwitz or of an immigrant washed up on the island of Lampedusa practically naked. We have lost the perception of physical privation. We can imagine how we would feel in a cage, without the possibility of freely expressing our opinions and being limited in our movements, but we cannot imagine what it would be like to be subjected to physical privation.

Our perception of such suffering is limited to what we see in films reconstructing the past, or in vintage footage taken at the time. Our eye alone has the task of establishing what such sensations were like, which is why it is so important to attempt to preserve the memory of the suffering of our race. The risk is that the pain will enter the sphere of the unreal, imaginary world cultivated in Hollywood.

In recent years, the situation has reached a point of paradox in America: the lack of privation and the widespread state of wellbeing has caused an outbreak of obesity within the population. An increasing number of individuals are distressingly overweight, with serious consequences for both public health and medical spending. A recent news report told of the government's latest attempt to bring the trend under control: including a grade on weight in the students' report cards!

On the third level of pyramid, that regarding belonging, the need of many young people to take part in groups of individuals with like thoughts becomes apparent. While political parties have trouble signing up new members among the young, environmentalist groups and volunteer associations find themselves continually having to print up new membership forms. The widespread growth of local bands, choruses and sports associations is another sign of the wish to experience emotions as a group, to be part of a herd.

On the fourth level of the pyramid, Maslow places needs involving self esteem, such as the desire to have a positive image, to think highly of oneself and to be admired by others. This is the level on which advertising and communications experts ply their trade.

Following the progression indicated by the pyramid, advertising has also changed, shifting the focus of its message from products to emotions. Increasing importance is placed on a company's brand name, as opposed to its individual products. Fashion labels are used to sell

clothing, perfumes, eyeglasses, wall tiles... Even carmakers, such as Ferrari, Porsche or Mercedes sell clothing and branded items (at times forgetting that their *raison d'être* is cars, as I once experienced firsthand with the Mercedes company, which, having failed to repair my car, gave me a free watch. Still, I bought my next car from a different company).

At the same time, advertisers have begun to take into account individuals who have already reached the fifth level of Maslow's scale, meaning the stage of self-fulfilment, at which point the communications strategy must be changed. The primary need of individuals at this level is to put their skills and testing their limits.

This phase is also characterised by the need to do something positive, to contribute in a way that leaves a mark and can serve as an example for others. A man like Berlusconi definitely finds himself at the top of this pyramid, and he is joined by many other powerful businessmen and politicians. What more could he want from life: possibly an award, or a paragraph or chapter in the history books, or a Nobel Peace Prize? In any event, something that guarantees him a certain amount of immortality.

The new frontier of communications and marketing is built upon a rediscovery of ethics in business, of the ties between culture and business, and of new forms of patronage of the arts and other worthy causes.³³ Though this has not stopped certain businesses from falsifying their balance-sheets. Indeed, if the current economic outlook is less than brilliant, part of the credit must go to certain hardworking corporate executives (at companies such as Enron, Parmalat and Cirio...) who, though positioned at the top of the pyramid, were just a stone's throw away from a jail cell. If America's pension funds must rapidly make good on losses tied to fraudulent investments, it is because one process ever proves to be perfectly linear. Maslow described human behaviour by setting up a scale of needs that he considered to be equal for everyone. But any real-life analysis must leave room for aberrations and distortions. The first rule of any scholar of human behaviour, of those who work on developing forms of group creativity, is that complexity lends curves and tangles to any process of evolution. In the words of Pennac, only death is a straight-line process.

Apart from any geometric digressions on the course of human development, the establishment of Ethical Banks, of the concept of sustainable finance and of social programs funded by major corporations is traceable to two distinct yearnings, both traceable to the needs found at the top of Maslow's pyramid.

The first is the need of top-level executives to tie their company's name, as well as their own, to programs that will endure over the years, beyond their own lifetimes. Growing numbers are following the example of Adriano Olivetti, who lives on thanks to the continuation of his outlook on social science, made possible by the foundation that bears his name.³⁴ In the USA this practice has been popular for many years, thanks in large part to the possibility of tax deductions. Major businessmen have become major donors by following their natural to support: museums, hospitals, university scholarship awards and programs of social assistance, as well as initiatives of environmental protection. Similar practices have been followed in Italy as well, though naturally to a lesser extent, seeing that our business system presents very different characteristics, being broken up, to a large degree, among small and medium-size enterprises. Berlusconi, who operates as both a businessman and a politician, provides a perfect example of this new urge.

The second, more materialistic concern is the need of manufacturing companies to avoid losing market share. When a portion of the population migrates from one level of the pyramid to another, there is a risk of losing customers whose buying patterns and stimuli have changed.

It is no accident that the changes which occurred in the fruit and produce market following the Mad Cow disease scare are slowly transforming the agro-food market, while the sale of biological and certified products is on the rise. Following the example of the commercial sector, restaurants, hotels, school cafeteria and other operators are converting their businesses into biological concerns.

A further sign of this trend is the increasing use of environmental certification systems, in particular the EMAS (Environmental Management and Audit Scheme). Production cycles are subjected to these voluntary procedures in order to raise levels of environmental

awareness and protection. The novel development is not the certifications, in and of themselves, but the types of organisations that have begun to participate in the process. An example is the town of Varese Ligure, one of the first municipalities to procure EMAS certification for its territory.

This small town in the Province of La Spezia, nestled in the Apennine Hills of the Liguria Region, covers an area of 34,000 acres, with roughly twenty different districts and a total population of 2,500. As is the case with all mountain communities, its population has declined drastically from a peak level of 8,000 at the start of the century. Even more worrisome is the ageing of the population. Since 1997 the conversion of the entire territory to the biological approach has led to the creation of more than 50 certified agricultural concerns, with the result that young people are taking a renewed interest in farming and repopulating the town.

In accordance with the well known law of supply and demand, no biological enterprises would have gotten off the ground, unless the market had asked for this type of product, and the market would have made no such request, had consumer preferences and purchasing habits not changed.

Seeing that the upward trend in the demand is, by now, an established fact, and that it shows no signs of weakening, the entire business and services sector is adjusting to this new reality. Consumers are becoming informed on their own, sales of books on ecology are on the rise, biological cuisine and tasting sessions of biological wine and olive oil are increasingly numerous... together with biological gardeners. In the vacation industry, the alternative lodgings sector, meaning agro-tourism facilities, hostels and bed & breakfasts, is doing a booming business. Generally speaking, the lifestyles of countless people, together with their habits of consumption, are moving in the direction of greater awareness.

Advertisers and communicators have had to bring their messages in line with this new type of lifestyle, and businesses have been obliged to change their strategies for market penetration. They have become more virtuous!

A perfect example of the change is the banking system. Along with traditional banks, which, in years gone by, were all more or less controlled by the central government or by major corporations, there have always been banks that operate in closer proximity to the actual needs of ordinary citizens. The Rural Savings Bank System was created to support farmers and livestock who were seen as weak, undesirable clients by the traditional banks, given that they were unable to provide the necessary loan guarantees.

At the time, this system of shareholders' cooperatives was hailed by Pope Paul VI as an example of solidarity and Christian ethics, in response to class-based technical approach of the capitalist system. We could say, once again paraphrasing the title of this narration, that the banking system was also familiar with the dualism of love/rationality that is the underlying theme of these reflections.

In other words, the Rural Savings Banks were simply the response of impassioned hearts to the administrative rigidity of individuals who made decisions with their heads alone. This cooperative system for providing loans, together with the system of solidarity, was a critical factor in the development of many rural zones, running counter to the trend of abandoning the countryside.

A similar operation was undertaken roughly twenty years ago in Bangladesh, when Muhammed Yunus founded the Grameen Bank, aptly enough referred to as the Bank of the Poor.³⁵ The bank is based on a system of micro-credit, providing loans for up to a few hundred dollars, primarily to extremely poor women who intend to start their own business. It seems like a mere drop in the bucket, but these loans proved to be the catalyst to an extremely important form of economic activity. The Grameen Bank has raised the life expectancy of thousands of families without any form of state subsidies and, surprisingly enough, with a practically zero rate of bad loans.

A good many traditional banks often go through cycles of financial difficulty tied to failed repayment of loans, especially on the part of large financial groups. Loans made under a rational approach give rise to difficulties, while those made with the heart are all paid back in full, demonstrating people are only truly moved by passion.

Another type of financial institution has recently taken this approach: the Ethical Bank, which "sustains the world of non-profit activities and economic solidarity, financing social cooperation, international cooperation, environmental defence and civil society". The Bank, founded only recently (1998), draws its inspiration from the MAG, or "Loans for Self-Management" system, of which it represents a natural outgrowth. The founding partners again include the Catholic and lay groups who act in response to the passions of the hearts.

The Bank's prepaid credit card finances the activities of the AGESCI (Italian Catholic Guides and Scouts Association), which is also one of the founding partners, together with the Italian Environmental League, the WWF and other lay associations. The articles of incorporation of the Bank state: "The Ethical Bank shall favour lending to organisations belonging to the third sector and formally established as cooperatives, associations, organisations and clubs (corporations are also eligible, as long as they are controlled by non-profit organisations).

While further details can be found directly website of the Ethical Bank, an interesting characteristics on which to reflect is the average age of the clients of these financial services. An article of 20 August 2003 in the *Gazzetta di Modena* states that, at present, the amount deposited by young people is greater than that of traditional cooperatives. The average client is a young, employed individual less than forty years old, while the goal of more than half of them, after opening their accounts, is to become a shareholder of the Bank.

At the same time, many corporations have financed initiatives of environmental defence or social assistance, which they then put to used in their communications campaigns, knowing that they will be able to renew contact with all those citizens who find themselves at the top of the Maslow scale, and who had no longer been receiving their messages; as a result, scores of seals of environmental certification have been created to study projects of intervention and monitor the progress made on such efforts.

An extremely interesting case is the Carbon Neutral seal in England, part of the Future Forest program, designed to guarantee the planning of new forests. Here too, the initiative drew the participation of

people and celebrities of a very young age: from Leonardo di Caprio to pop and rock groups on the rise.

In light of this recurring youth factor, which we already observed in the case of the protestors and objectors, might it just be that Dahrendorf was right, and that what we are witnessing is the emancipation of an entire generation?

Could it be that these programs of personal involvement in social and environmental initiatives are the active expression of the link between passion and rationality that moves the individual to engage in constructive efforts and take the step needed to make his or her dreams come true?

The mechanism is the same as that of Sundays set aside for cleaning up the environment (beaches, forests...) or for activities of social assistance involving the elderly or the needy. The sense of personal commitment, of being able to consider oneself a positive agent for change, an example for the rest of society, is the maximum form of gratification for all the participants. It is what sets them apart from the apathetic crowd whose indifference upsets the harmonious balance between man and the environment.

But there is another key factor that moves people to action and motivates them to participate directly in initiatives: the ongoing development of democracy, which, in many countries, has resulted in the disappearance of distinctions between social classes. As late as the nineteen-sixties, in my small hometown, founded as an appendage to a major arms industry that employed roughly ten thousand workers at the height of its activities, there were still separate public establishments and gathering sites for executives, middle-level managers and workers. Civil Servants, as well as railway workers and teachers, all had their distinctive, highly recognisable places within the social framework.

Together with the increasing democratisation of the town, there has been a drop in the number of workers employed directly in the factory and a rise in secondary activities established by up-and-coming suppliers and small businessmen who are masking their way up the social ladder.

The social labels of years past have lost their meaning, and individuals can no longer be recognised exclusively by their class origin.

The youth protests of the 60's-70's also contributed to eroding subjective certainties, making it necessary for people to identify anew their positions within the community. A pressing need for recognition arose (as shown by the example of the upper levels of the Maslow pyramid), with the only way to satisfy it being to dialogue, at times to struggle, in order to instil in others the image and the meanings we wish to give ourselves. The need for identity is what directs our actions, though it must be negotiated, in a certain sense, with others, through dialogue and exchange. A further need that has taken on urgency is that of belong to a group which shares some of the symbols we consider to be positive.

In youth, this striving towards self-fulfilment takes on violent, dramatic overtones. The mastery of language and the capacity to understand cultures different from our own (in terms of gender, age, education, instruction and nationality ...) are skills that grow sharper with age. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the concept of culture has been expand, seeing that it can no longer limit itself to the production of works of art, but must delve into day-to-day life, into the social and environmental spheres. Sport has become an area of culture, with the team colours providing the new framework for the lost class identity of years past.

Recognition through support of a sports team is total and immediate, highly effective in its absolute simplicity. But a commitment to the environment, or to volunteer work in general, also constitutes a way of reassembling a fragmented society and restoring dignity to the individual. The overriding theme of democracy becomes the capacity to dialogue with these minorities, to defend diversity and multi-nationalism, the term that should take the place of multi-ethnicity, seeing that differences traceable to geographic boundaries are disappearing.

When Italian soldiers entered Kabul, after the fall of the Taliban regime, they discovered that the children knew all about the soccer players Totti and Baggio, who have become much more effective cultural symbols of culture than the Mona Lisa or the Coliseum. And such scenes are repeated throughout the world, whether the children live in Korea or China. There are no customs barriers, there are no limits on

the freedom of information set by some two-bit dictator that can stifle the growing symbolic power of sports.

Sports groups serve the same function as environmentalist groups, being capable of generating symbols able to represent a body of individuals in search of a mode of self-recognition. Sports create cultural symbols capable of triggering the passions of the heart. Along with the rational explanation for the formation of a group, there always exists the underlying subjective make-up of its driving passions.

A number of sociologists expand and modify the scale of Maslow by pointing to spirituality as the natural stage beyond the uppermost level, but I myself do not share this outlook. Spirituality can be found at every level of the Maslow pyramid, even though certain elements taken from new-age philosophy and currents of oriental thought can lead to this erroneous conclusion.

At the top of the pyramid, for example, are a large number of teachers and parents searching for ways to leave a better world for future generations, for their children. These are people who, in addressing the problem of identifying positive values on which to base their models of education, find that respect for the environment provides a number of responses to their questions. A look at the children's section of a bookstore immediately gives an idea of how the types of tales, stories and morals have changed since those which my generation heard from their grandmothers. And the contrast is even more apparent when the point of comparison is a book of nineteenth-century fables by Phaedrus³⁶ and Aesop³⁷. Today, one of the key themes is respect of the environment: the heroes and heroines no longer fight against ogres, but against arrogant polluters. This is another reason why Bush holds such a negative place in the collective of many Europeans, being seen as an oilman bent on dirtying the planet. He is linked to the disastrous oil spills, with his face having become ideologically symbolic of evil.

And so we can distinguish a noteworthy shift on the Maslow scale, corresponding to the point at which the focus changes from external needs to internal needs: a first phase characterised by the lack of something outside the individual (food, a home etc....), and a second phase tied to the need for internal growth.

Looking at this second set of aspirations, progress from one level to the next, meaning the individual's process of internal growth, corresponds to Piaget's learning process. One of the leading proponents of cognitive theories, Piaget originated the concept of genetic epistemology, according to which the learning process always occurs through interaction with the environment³⁸, meaning that it follows, in a certain sense, both the path of the heart and that of reason.

Learning occurs according to a pattern consisting of two alternating phases: assimilation and accommodation. The first entails responding to external variations, disturbances or stresses in accordance with guidelines that we have already drawn up, and that are part of our being. The second involves the formulation of new, personalised guidelines that prove more responsive to our need to harmonise our relationship with the outside world. This is the phase in which we readjust, based on changes in the environment.

“Within the mechanism of development, assimilation has the task of throwing the mind off balance; accommodation, on the other hand, restores the balance to a level of adjustment in line with a reality more advanced than the one that preceded it” (Lazzara).³⁹ The above description corresponds to the heart/mind dualism that constitutes the central theme of this narration.

Once again, we are dealing with the cyclical contrast between emotional urges and rational urges that lead men to engage in a never-ending behavioural sequence of acts that are both antithetical and complementary. These two driving forces are the same that accompany the individual throughout his or her lifetime, in the course of the generational emancipation, underlying the tension between dream and reality, during the upbringing of the children. It is the story of our process of evolution. If we are primitive, we rely on the use of the bow and arrows (under the Zen method, we use the heart and the mind)⁴⁰, if we are advanced, we follow the instructions for the video recorder or the computer. Regardless of the field of application, we shall always follow a double parallel path.

We could consider this to be the diversity in the production of cultural objects, making it worthwhile to reflect on the concept of

culture as the creation of the meanings and symbols necessary for our lives as social beings.

According to Wendy Griswold, having learned to be born, men must now learn to live.⁴¹ But this brings to mind a book I found myself unable to finish reading, so abject was the horror I felt: *Lord of the Flies*.⁴² The story tells of a group of shipwrecked boys from well-to-do families who find themselves on a marvellous island in the midst of a dreamlike sea: a sort of Blue Lagoon. With the problem being that the need to satisfy their primal needs drives these boys to forsake their refined breeding and give in to their baser instincts. The violence begins, along with the worship of symbols and the oppression of others. I was unable to make it through the book. As Borges would say, I was afraid to glimpse the tiger inside myself.⁴³ To put it more simply, I find myself at a level of the scale of needs far removed from primal urges, and so it is difficult for me to accept the possibility of a return to the basic level, though I cannot absolutely rule out the eventuality of regressing to an animal-like type of existence. The disbelief experience is the same that arises in the face of the horrors of Nazism, or of any other dictatorship that we have already mentioned. The problem is not doubting what took place, but rather comprehending how those who committed the crimes can be considered human beings who, based on outward appearances, would seem to be no different than us.

The role of culture becomes fundamental in our society: it offers a set of guidelines and a sense of belonging to a group. It indicates the direction our positive evolution should take. It prevents the projection in reality of bestial urges. It restores and revives collective meanings. Its sharing and its creation have constituted a fundamental need of the individual since the dawn of time, since man's initial appearance on the planet.

If we examine in depth the way in which the meaning of the term culture has been expanded at present, to the point where it also includes the environment, it becomes clear that environmental issues can be addressed precisely as a cultural problem involving the creation of meanings and symbols on the part of a social group or collective body.

Cultural products differ, based on the level of Maslow's pyramid where the individuals who create them find themselves, with the

solutions to practical, day-to-day problems being found at hew lower levels, whole issues relating to the environment are higher up on the scale.

This observation leads to two important considerations. The first, that environmental issues are essentially a concern of the well-to-do! The second reflection, on the other hand, regards the motives that move the hearts of the young people who go out on the street to protest. Once again the dichotomy between rationality and passion, between head and heart, comes to the fore.

But we should move one step at a time, analysing the first consideration, which has to do with financial and social wellbeing.

A number of years ago the term radical chic came into vogue, referring to people who enjoyed passing their time addressing social issues, though the tone was rather derogatory, reflecting a failure to understand that some people's need to feel they are playing a useful, positive role within their community can take on the status of a primal urge. What merits a negative judgment and criticism is the transposition of this need onto the ideological plane through the use of symbols or sectarian labels. But this too is part of the normal anthropological bearings of the individual: the need to feel a part of a group or to establish a sense of identity through the use of certain cultural symbols.

All the above further confirms the fact that the need to feel useful, in either the social or the environmental spheres, remains a concern of the well-to-do, of people who have already satisfied all their other needs. Indeed, environmental issues first arose in the more economically advanced western economies, in which affluence had spread to the point where everyone had a chance to emerge from the "crowd" and to better their way of life. The concept of quality of life became a topic of everyday discussion, and insurance companies introduced concepts such as biological damages or existential damages, which would have seemed preposterous just a few years earlier.

Incredibly enough, this also takes place during discussions in many countries of the former Soviet bloc, as well as in the third world. If the poorer zones become the waste depot of the West, it is because their level on the scale of needs keeps them from seeing the extent of the damage that can be caused to their environment by their unrestrained

speculation. Without entering into the details of the policy discussions, it is hard to believe that the problem of waste can be more important than that of health or hunger.

And then there are cases that strike right at the heart, such as the 1984 disaster in Bhopal, India, an incident that led to the immediate death of more than 6,000 people, and to the intoxication of 500,000 people from poisonous gases. As of today, the number of deaths can be estimated at approximately 16,000, a disaster much larger than that of Chernobyl, and, as can be seen by leafing through the pages of Internet, still very much alive in the memories of many and a stimulus to the hearts of young dreamers who seek to challenge the enormous power of certain multinationals, such as Union Carbide.

While rationality extends only as far as the technical account of what happened and the motives for the disaster, the heart still cries out in indignation, requesting aid to remedy the environmental damage that still poses a threat to the lives of citizens of the area. In fact, contaminated water is still one of the major causes of illness suffered by the local population. The water, in turn, pollutes the crops, jeopardising the entire food chain.

Seen in this light, the profile of the young people who take to the street to demonstrate should come as no surprise. They are the children of well-to-do families who do not have to worry about satisfying their primary needs, and who feel the need to consider themselves useful, to do the “right thing”. It makes no sense to talk about radical chic, or communists or fascists, but rather about the new generations that are laying the groundwork for the values on which to base their entry into civil society. This is why environmental concern can no longer be focussed solely on nature, but must include the considerations on the distribution of wealth and resources, taking a leading role in discussions of those topics. This is why the clash is generational, taking place through the cultural symbols that one generation attempts to force another to accept.

And this is why the issue of the environment, broadened in this manner, is the principle theme of our children’s education and the link with which we are building the new generational ties.

4. Risk of Living, Risk of Dying

Bellum se ipsum alet
(War feeds itself)

(Livio, *Ab urbe condita*)

A bizarre situation has arisen in America: the excessive number of malpractice suits has pushed the cost of insurance for many physicians sky-high, and so quite a few are abandoning the medical profession altogether. In a number of states, such as Florida or California, finding a neurologist or gynaecologist to carry out certain delicate procedures has become as hard as finding a plumber here in Italy. In the case of a well established physician, the cost of malpractice insurance can reach four million euro a year. Subject to enormous stress from patients and attorneys, the doctors decide to move to states where the insurance premiums are lower, or they take the drastic step of changing their line of work.

If the situation did not have such dramatic repercussions, it could simply be chalked up to one of the prices to pay for democracy, but this perspective risks failing to capture the true extent of the problem. In a country where public healthcare is practically non-existent, the spiralling increases in the cost of insurance/medical care effectively an increasing number of people without any healthcare.

But what has brought things to this point? The answer lies in the inability to cope with and accept pain, as well as in a change in the perception of the concepts of danger and risk. Faith in science, and in the possibility of understanding all events by tracing them back to a limited

number of predetermined and pre-determinable patterns, has led many individuals to the erroneous supposition that they can quantify and weigh the different occurrences of life. Two logical steps with exceptional repercussions have been taken: the first from the concept of danger to that of risk, while the second entails the diminishment of the meaning of the term appropriateness. The unconditional trust in Science, which started with Descartes and the enlightenment, characterised the accepted mode of thought among individuals until just a few years ago. This leaning led to the cognitive theory of risk, which was seen as “the product of the probability and the consequences (dimensions and gravity) of the occurrence of a given negative event (of a danger)”⁴⁴. Various types of specialists were needed to establish the probability: engineers, statisticians, experts in actuarial mathematics, psychologists, epidemiologists, economists....

The presumably unchallengeable nature of figures and scientific results provided space for an increasingly vigorous sector of investigative activities on the part of attorneys-adjusters attempting to comprehend the distances between probable events and statistical events and to assign the responsibility for the difference to someone. Through such activities, responsibility was shifted from the individual, with consideration no longer given to the interdependence of a plurality of different factors and external subjects.

In the environmental sector, this phase has frequently coincided with a struggle against multinational corporations, facilitating the reduction in the sense of individual responsibility. The example of tobacco addiction and the (once) rich chains of cigarette manufacturing activities provides an extreme perspective of the situation. Though the manufacturers did hide the use of additives meant to render smokers even more dependent, there was no way anyone could have harboured doubts as to the “healthiness” of smoking.

The suits brought against the multinationals have accelerated the decline of individual responsibility, while, at the same time, accelerating the creation of new cultural symbols around which new communities can be established. It can be said that the splintering of the social order by attorneys has resulted in a reorganisation of society into groups held together by new objectives and dreams.

The individual, virtually nullified by the growing tide of globalisation and the depersonalisation of human activities, rebuilds a local identity by joining a group that rallies around a given interest or banner. The most active participants band together to fight environmental crusades, while many others simply form volunteer groups devoted to pursuing noble causes.

The common cultural foundation, the catalysing element around individuals form new groups, is the concept and perception of risk. This outlook is not identical in the various Western countries, but it is definitely a consideration that points to the first and marked difference with the other countries. Within Western societies, different modes of perceiving risk can be distinguished, based on a variety of different factors that can involve culture, education, the group to which the individual belongs.... At first glance, the positions at the two extremes would appear to be the cognitive outlook and fatalism: reason and heart. Setting aside for a moment the ways of passion and spirituality, let us focus our attention on the cold, lucid manner in which the realm of the real can be broken down into fractions of itself.

Individuals, and especially those with higher levels of education, have been led to believe that they can plan their entire existence according to preordained patterns. Attorneys have encouraged the idea that life can be viewed as a straight path along which every form of risk can be calculated and eliminated.

Browsing through an Internet guide, one encounters a vast proliferation of agencies and companies engaged in risk analysis and management, promising to assist us in any circumstance of our existence by calculating the way to avoid pain. Destiny, defined in the classical sense, and the acceptance of Fate no longer exist for this group of rational individuals. Physicians constitute the first weak link for attacks by those seeking to hold in check the unforeseeable nature of chance: no one is allowed to make mistakes. Each error must elicit legal action and punishment. The terms psychological and biological damage are sued, along with unfulfilled life expectancy: as the lawyers see it, everything must be quantifiable and reimbursable.

To say nothing of the fact that the insurance companies can decide whom to insure and for how much, attempting to obtain a genetic

profile for each client in order to draw up their business plans. This is why in certain states, and for a number of professions, insurance policies are more expensive. The asymmetric nature of this market has been brilliantly examined by Joseph Stiglitz⁴⁵, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2001, and it could lead to paradoxical situations that have yet to be imagined. An idea of the ramifications of what is taking place is provided by the multinational tobacco manufacturer Philip Morris, which is slowly sinking into bankruptcy, under the unsustainable weight of the legal expenses it must sustain to defend itself against all the suits demanding damages.

Public health is the priority problem to be faced by any government, and a good healthcare system constitutes the groundwork for the development of the poorer countries. The close tie between health and economics was addressed by another winner of the Noble Prize for Economics, the Anglo-Indian scholar Amartya Sen, whose book *Development and Freedom* pointed to a good national healthcare system as one of the indispensable preconditions to economic progress.⁴⁶ Naturally it is not the only requirement, but without a healthcare system, without a healthy population, it is impossible to plan initiatives of development. What is more, the attention paid to questions of healthcare can constitute an unexpected source of revenue. As astonishing case is that of Cuba, which manages to offset the cost of the crude oil it imports from Venezuela by supplying medical services to the Caribbean country.

What occurs in the field of healthcare is only the tip of a much deeper and complex iceberg, a failing that permeates our culture, preventing us from accepting change. The same rigidity affects countless other disciplines. Lawyers are slowly convincing us that reality is objective, and that we can all perceive it in the same way. Indeed, apart from being objective, it is also held that reality can be represented and placed within limits established under regulations and codes that must be “equal for everyone”. The theme of equality is definitely one of man’s most important advances, dating back to 1789 and the French Revolution. But there can be no sacrificing the entire mode of viewing life and human activity to its motto. As is pointed out by the German philosopher Habermas, the excessive regulatory rigidity brought into being by the democratic system can result in uncontrollable forms of

increased entropy, meaning effects diametrically opposed to those desired: “In modernity, forms of life that turn rigid fall victim to entropy”.⁴⁷ A lawyer has less heart than an accountant, who often leads crusades against the tyrannical power of the tax department. Attorneys may presume to understand everything through rationality, trapping and packaging portions of the heart in legislative systems brought into being by overly rational minds.

The most unsettling aspect of the allure of these theories is that they lend themselves very well to communication through the media. Their message, focussing on the good/bad dichotomy, proves quite popular with the film industry, for example, providing the stiff of myths and unconfirmed tales. The simplification of the real, and its classification within simplistic relational frameworks, facilitates the creation of cultural symbols which, once they are placed back in society, give life to communities. In a certain sense, rationality leads back to passion, as was easily foreseeable, and in the same way as rigidity leads to entropy. Evolution moves forward in the form of successive and alternating extremes, with instances of excess holding the seed for change and for passages to other realities.

Two distinct driving forces coexist in our society (once again traceable to the heart/rationality dichotomy): the yearning for equality and the yearning for diversity. Though the fact that we are equal has been accepted by society as a whole, and has been considered an integral part of every individual’s formation, for a number of years now there has been increasing talk of safeguarding minorities. This is a sign of the definitive evolutionary transformation from an individualistic society to the post-individualistic society of the community. At the same time, the size of these minorities tends to fall, until they almost reach the individual level. As we have already seen, if modern individuals lack the reference framework of belonging to a group, then they constantly need to negotiate their visibility. Charles Taylor expresses the concept quite clearly when he states that, “We always define our identity by dialoguing, and occasionally struggling, with the things that others whom we consider meaningful wish to see in us”.⁴⁸ The scholars of the sociology of knowledge, Berger e Luckmann⁴⁹, also hold that reality should be understood as a “social construction”, meaning that it should

be considered a process of give and take between individuals and the social groups to which they belong. But the same situation occurs between social groups and society as a whole. Each element, on any given occasion, serves to create cultural symbols and to reflect the meanings of other symbols. On both the individual and collective levels, therefore, the concept of negotiation once again holds. Taken as a group, what environmentalists negotiate is the future and all the dreams connected to it, while, on a reduced scale, in terms of the individual members of the group, the negotiating process also addresses the present, in the form of their degree of social recognition. The safeguarding and showcasing of minorities is thus a part of this process of fragmenting and rearranging social groups, representing the other face of globalisation, through the defence of what is imminent: of small dreams. But these are simply two sides of the same coin. As Ulrich Beck notes, the paradox of this point in history is that the same analysis also holds, albeit on a larger scale, for countries.⁵⁰ The problem of a breakdown in identity can also be observed on the macro-scale, and it is only through a process of denationalisation, following the achievement of a trans-nationalisation, that a collective national identity can be obtained.

The one true obstacle to these processes, which, in the form described, appear to be entirely inborn features of the anthropological evolution of our society, is the attempt to codify this evolution under increasingly numerous and rigorous measures. Social processes cannot be governed through rational codifications that rein in the emotional thrust of individual passions. Once again, the risk is degeneration in the direction of uncontrollable manmade systems, meaning entropy. And the wars waged in the name of cultural symbols are increasingly numerous and found throughout the world.

On occasion efforts to defend minorities prove excessive, to the point where the very principle of equality is negated through the introduction of protective measures that wind up increasing the privileges of the minorities in question.

These dual pulsations are found in all discipline, and not only in the areas of social concerns or legislation acts. In architecture, we could say that the tendency towards rigidity is represented by the exasperated

rigour of certain schools for the restoration and preservation of resources, of the inability to mix and contaminate the language of the past with that of the present. In the field of urban planning, we could say that this outlook is embodied in the presumption that territorial development can be controlled through the numbers left to the interpretation of courts and legal experts. But how can even a minimum of harmonious development be imagined, if those most qualified to express their opinions on the transformations affecting the landscape are attorneys? With respect to transformations of local territories, the excessive rigidity of the legislative system has already led to entropy, meaning chaos, seeing that the Italian landscape has been polluted by an invasion of buildings constructed without any order or standards. In the wake of the chaos, however, there can emerge a new, less structured order that is the result of negotiations among the key players. For some years now, there has been a reversal in the trend in urban planning, with the traditional General Regulatory Plan being accompanied by a number of different complex plans calling for public/private cooperation. It is interesting to note the acronym used for one of the most important new urban-planning programs: PRUSST, or Plan for Urban Renewal geared towards the Sustainable Development of the Territory.

In the field of urban planning, therefore, it has been understood that sustainable development can be reached only through the negotiation of solutions among the different parties involved, including environmentalist associations, acting as representatives of the “stakeholders”. The concept expressed in Rio de Janeiro returns to centre stage, constituting the fulcrum for the modernisation of the democratic forms of nations through programs of grass-roots participation and the making of shared choices. The ongoing development of the central government/citizen relationship arose from nothing less than a conference on the environment: a fact that should be reflected on when attempting to understand the broader significance of the term. The environment cannot be seen as simply “the set of physical, chemical and biological conditions that make possible and favour the existence of living beings”, but must also be considered “the sum total of the social, cultural and moral conditions in which a person finds himself/herself, is formed and achieves individual definition” (Devoto –

Oli). It is under this second meaning that political come into being, as well as full-fledged parties, such as the Greens, while this same shift from the contingent to the general not only ensures that a similar party can be immediately replicated in every nation of Europe, but that immediate contacts are established with many other non-government movements in every corner of the globe. The mistake does not lie, therefore, in considering the protests of young people during the summits of international governing bodies (the WTO, G8 etc...) to be outbursts of passion or utopian distortions, but rather to lend an aura of infallibility and dogmatic rigidity to certain positions. Holding fast to scientific certitude is defensible when it comes to defending certain positions with passion, but it cannot be taken as a dogma to be followed in perpetuity. For that matter, the various points of view expressed by different scientists on the individual components of the indefinable complexity or reality would lead to disenchantment on the part of citizens. The resulting disorientation pushes individuals in the direction of cynicism, or towards the peace of mind offered by a small number of incontrovertible assumptions. Instances of cultural fanaticism are the upshot.

The general lack of a reference framework has allowed certain rigid positions to take on the status of cultural symbols, elevating their original technical value into assumptions held to be infallible: flags around which to rally. This has greatly increased the capacity for banding together and creating communities of reference, but it has also generated dangerous misunderstandings. Science moves ahead by negation as well. Without having to hearken back to Copernicus or Galileo, we can consider how mathematicians occasionally demonstrate their theorems by starting from a negation ("If we were to say, merely for the sake of conjecture ..."). And in the case of the earth sciences, the environment and meteorology, it is especially true that there are no points of certainty, and that natural occurrences are governed by a complexity which science has only begin to explore.

To return to the rigidity of government positions, from the field of healthcare to urban planning, it is safe to say that, in the case of the environment, examples of this inflexibility can be found in the unbending stances of certain environmental groups. What we are up

against, therefore, is a double set of barriers: the regulatory ones put in place by the political sector and the idealistic ones endorsed by the protest groups. Once again heart and reason come into conflict, as do the young with the less young. But there is also conflict between young nations and older ones.

If we consider the recent failure of the Cancun summit, we can liken the protests of the developing countries to the impassioned hearts of the young people, while the positions of the advanced democracies resemble those of the parents of the impassioned youths. The countries of the third world have very little bargaining power in their struggle to abolish the agricultural subsidies maintained by the Western countries, but they certainly possess the fire and strength of passion: traits typical of those who wish to change the world by building their own network of cultural symbols, so as to change the meaning of those inherited from previous generations. Noteworthy support for such struggles has arrived from non-government organisations, meaning, once again, from the stirrings of young people within Western societies. In other words, the broad international debate is rooted in the cultural struggles underway within the western democracies.

As can be seen, when addressing the topic of the environment, it is easy to stray into areas generally held to be the responsibility of politicians, with rigidly held environmental positions rapidly giving rise to a number of different battles. To return to the complexity of environmental issues, the view that the changes which occur on the planet should all be attributed exclusively to the effect of man-related actions is tantamount to holding that, before man appeared on the planet, the natural cycles repeated themselves without any changes whatsoever for days, months, years, millennia. Were we not aware of the absurdity of such an outlook, we might truly believe that all the guilt was ours to bear.

Deep in our hearts, however, the idea that we might be able to restore the planet to an undisturbed state, if only we could change the way we behave, finds much more fertile ground than we might imagine. We are almost comforted by the fact that atmospheric emissions of carbon dioxide could be reduced by a treaty which, if applied to the letter, would lead to a severe recession in many western economies. And

we are intrigued by the opportunity to identify a scapegoat. It can be Bush or Malaussète⁵¹, but, in the end, what we really need to do is work on establishing the dialogue between heart and mind, on reconciling passion and rationality, in order to succeed in taking concrete action able to improve the relationship between man and his environment.

America had the courage not to sign the Kyoto Treaty and to declare its opposition publicly. Other countries hypocritically signed the Treaty, though they knew full well they would never respect it, as is demonstrated by the general rise in emissions in almost all the nations of the world.

In the end, what will such efforts have accomplished, if an eruption like the one in Krakatoa (1883), whose tidal wave reached as far as the coasts of England, can modify the climate of the entire planet for many years afterwards, disrupting agricultural activities and, with them, the economies of a large number of countries? Even lesser eruptions, such as St. Helen (1980) or Piñatubo (1991), can cause atmospheric disturbances much greater than anything a few hundred million people can set in motion.

Once again, it is not right to dialogue only with the heart, and to judge only in the giddy grip of passion, when addressing a problem as complex as the environment. If scientists are still unable to provide us with a thorough explanation of the vital flows of our eco-system, why concentrate our hearts on only one aspect of the problem while completely neglecting the context?

Would it not be better to comprehend the importance of what can actually be done, of restoring a harmonious relationship with the environment, meaning with life itself? It is very convenient to have a scapegoat. It means we no longer have to reflect on the complexity and the significance of the role of the earth's individual inhabitants. We can overlook our personal responsibilities within the eco-system, our destiny. We can avoid the risk of reaching decisions. Once again we return to the problem of the meaning of risk within Western society, and how the capacity to accept and to understand risk is one of the issues on which society's ongoing development hinges.

The management of risk becomes the management of fears, or rather, the courage to cope with them. Anxiety that degenerates into fear

fogs the senses, blunting our mental capacity and weakening our ability to face whatever choices we have to make. In a certain sense, it has a negative influence on all our relations, lacing us in a role of psychological subjugation.

An example is the way we deal with illness: fear of the unknown prevents us from continuing to lead the same life we had before, leaving us dependent on a specialised physician. But the level and intensity of the fear, rather than being statistical facts, vary in accordance with our doubt or awareness regarding the level of risk we are facing. When we fall ill, the psychological panic can be lessened by knowledge of our state of health (either positive or negative) and of the course of therapy that awaits us. And this is true even when we are certain that the outcome will be negative. As the sociologist Peter Berger states, the ultimate human fear is not evil, but chaos.⁵²

A heated debate is currently underway on the topic of risk, involving scholars who approach the subject from different perspectives, including cultural sociologists, experts in the field of cognitive sciences and those who defend positions regarding the extent to which risk can be governed. One thing that is certain is that any definition of risk must be part of a complex construction of reality that includes factors influenced by the state of each individual and his or her relations with the context of reference. To continue using the representation of society provided by the Maslow scale, we say that an individual's attitude towards risk, and his or her ability to deal with it, vary in accordance to the level of the pyramid where they find themselves. For example, the new generations, meaning those on the higher levels, are far more willing to suffer the ups and downs of a flexible employment situation than were earlier generations, though they are ill prepared to deal with the distress caused by illness or to accept death. A clear-cut distinction arises between those who view the uncertainty of the working world as a possible opportunity, meaning individuals at the top of the pyramid, with a higher level of culture, and those who experience the same uncertainty as an unfortunate development, but accept it with fatalistic resignation. It is individuals living in the lower reaches of the pyramid who see flexibility as a curse that brings with it firings, unemployment and competition with new immigrants.

Looking at the employment mobility and flexibility of the younger generations, we see that it is a permanent outlook. There was a time when holding one job for your entire life was the norm, and there are still companies that boast of the fact that they see their employees right through to retirement. But such situations are growing increasingly rare, and the average operating life of a small-scale company in Italy is ten years: far too little for any kind of a pension! The mirage of a steady, permanent job has also lost almost all its allure on the new generations, and especially among university graduates. A poll taken among students in the second year of the course of study leading to a management engineering degree at Rome's Tor Vergata University showed that none of them wished to find a steady, permanent job. Each student already took it for granted that he or she would change employers at least once. The new yearning, replacing the certainty of a permanent position, is the possibility of founding one's own firm or company. In other words, self-fulfilment: the fundamental need of those who find themselves at the top of the Maslow pyramid. A recent CENSIS survey shows this desire to have dampened slightly, compared to the recent past, but this can be considered a consequence of the current worldwide economic outlook, and any turnaround in the trend would have to be confirmed over a number of years.

It is interesting to note the direct contrast between the ways the two sets of individuals deal with instability: in one case, the subject passively accepts a system thrust upon him or her, while, in the other, an active role is played, through the creation of activities of one's own initiative, facing all the risks connected with managing one's own fears.

An individual in charge of a company of his or her own must constantly make decisions, existing in a state of uncertainty with regard to the future (whether the uncertainty is short, medium or long-term makes no difference for the purposes of our reflections). The capacity to cope with this situation of variability and make it work to one's advantage allows certain individuals to become leaders, while others must content themselves to follow. This is not the sole skill required of a manager, but the ability to deal with problems head on and make rapid decisions is definitely one of the key characteristics to be looked for in a business executive, when it comes both to controlling and to optimising

the capacity of future leaders to deal with risk. The courses of study at a number of business management schools include extreme sports. The capacity to cope with this type of uncertainty is the same aptitude needed to overcome the day-to-day risks connected with the management of workgroups.

At the same time, the talents of the new leaders must also include an ability to provide the team with emotional support in difficult situations, seeing that it is in such moments that an approach of shared participation can give rise to a creative process.⁵³ A creative way to resolve crises is through the formulation of solutions which are, in part, traceable to the emotional intelligence of the participants. Solutions, as well as learning, according to Piaget, always arise from a process of acceptance of change, followed by assimilation, in accordance with an individual working method⁵⁴. The dichotomy between heart and reason is once again present. On the one hand, the leader must maintain an undistorted outlook in situations of uncertainty, while, at the same time, he or she must be capable of understanding the emotional make-up of the team being led and of putting the strengths of each member of the team to best advantage.

Those who lack this capacity, or who prove unable, on their own, to overcome the fear of making choices, draw on new professional figures capable of serving as mediators in addressing this relationship with themselves. These are specialists in evaluating situations of risk, meaning that they are able to channel the fear by arriving at an awareness of the paths along which it can be released, in addition to enabling the individual to rational reality through processes that he or she would not be able to undertake alone. Here again, in examining what is an increasingly widespread attitude in Western societies, the dichotomy that underlies all reasoning is readily apparent. The courage to take on a new job, as compared to the courage to wash up on the shore of a completely unknown country as an illegal immigrant. A younger generation of immigrants, compared to the older generation of the advanced democracies. One group uses their heart and passion to cope with hardship, while the other relies on rationality and interpreters of emotions, giving rise to an army of mediators who act as a buffer between the individual and society.

Each new situation in which we find ourselves, and thus each socio-environmental interrelation that arises as a result, makes it necessary to engage in new and ongoing evaluations, in addition to making new choices on a continuous basis. Each decision generates doubt and uncertainty, and the more complex the scale of relations becomes, the greater the number of such mental steps that must be carried out. The distress tied to the inability to manage one's own emotions is the cause of an incredible increase in the anxiety many people experience in living. Depression and stress are the most widespread illnesses of Western society, being rooted in the inability to deal with one's emotions, in the need to come up with a rational explanation for everything that occurs, in the secret hope that reality can be brought under control. Many are still in a Cartesian phase, hopeful of being able to frame reality in objective terms, and still far removed from the realisation that such complexity cannot be governed.

In the field of the environment, this same complexity sparks the highly rational minds of insurance companies to attempt to understand the unforeseeable. This last summer of drought and blackout in western Europe and America, as well as uncustomary flooding in the certain normally desert zones of the earth, has led economists and attorneys to come up with certain numerical quantifications of risk that prove especially interesting.

Roughly 1/3 of the American GDP (meaning almost three trillion dollars) is subject to climate-related risk. The site of the German re-insurance company Munich Re estimates that the economic losses for natural disasters have risen from 35 billion dollars in 2001 to 54.6 billion in 2002. Even though the majority of the disasters took place in Asia, the highest premiums were paid in America and Europe, and the trend for 2003 points to even higher figures.

The insurance companies rely on consultants and high-level experts who, being unable to venture reliable forecasts, increase the policies on premiums. Meanwhile, the report of another major company, Swiss Re, contains a very interesting conclusion. Since 1860 (the year from which regular statistics on the climate were first kept), the years 2002 and 1998 have been the hottest on record, while the ten hottest years have all been registered since 1987, leaving no doubt as to the

marked influence of human activity on the climate. As a result, Swiss Re has decided to encourage ecology, in the belief that the best way to fight the effect of Man on the planet is to teach him to respect the environment and save energy: precisely what environmentalists have been saying for decades!! Perhaps we have reached the point in time where passion gives way to rationality in the continuing push in this direction? Insurance companies are currently considering reducing the cost of policies for those who pursue environmentally correct policies.

This new outlook on the part of one of the world's largest reinsurance companies, in all its unadulterated pragmatism, demonstrates the need to use environmental issues to change people's mindsets. In instances where campaigns to heighten awareness fall short, or protest movements fail to gain support, perhaps down-to-earth considerations of profit and loss could prove more effective: *pecunia non olet*.

In any event, the final objective is always to teach Man new ways of putting his nature and resources to work, in order to modify his behaviour and reach his heart.

5. The True Environmental Issue

*“What is a course in history or philosophy, or on poetry,
however well organised, or the best society,
or the most admirable pace of life, compared with
the discipline of always looking at what there is to see?
Do you wish to be readers or mere students, or
even clairvoyants? Read your destiny, look at what you
have in front of you, and move forward into the future”.*

(Henry David Thoreau)

This passage from Thoreau can be interpreted from a number of different perspectives and ultimately traced back to the dichotomy we are addressing between reason and passion. The first part, regarding the study of philosophy and poetry, bows to the predominant role of rational knowledge, while the second leaves space for the emotions, freeing individuals from objective research and pushing them in the direction of an active role. The distance that separates those who look from those who move forward into the future is the same that divides the opposing fronts in environmental struggles.

Finding a common ground between the positions is no easy matter. On the one hand, “Passion does not permit compromise”, as is noted by Michael Walzer, while, at the same time, frontal clashes do not lead to harmonic growth.¹ Leaving space for emotion without attempting to grasp the underlying reasons means leaving space for a process of destruction from which a new order will definitely emerge, the problem being that there is no way to foresee its form. Having one order replace another is a natural occurrence in the history of civilisation, but it is never painless. Today we have the logical tools, as well as the scientific instruments, needed to understand the mechanisms through which our

mind behaves, as well as the cyclical nature of events, and so we can experiment with alternate approaches.

Looking at the clash of passions over the cultural topics of religion or ethnic differences, being fought in so many different of the world, it is hard to imagine how such fiery spirits can be reconciled. The last few years have seen the world rife with local passions and ardent claims, from the birth of new nationalisms to the rediscovery of old flags. But the situation is different with environmental issues, “It is a common error to associate impassioned zeal with ignorance”¹, and an ability to identify and acknowledge the depth of the underlying assumptions can facilitate the encounter between passion and reason.

This assertion might appear to echo the ethos of the enlightenment, endorsing the supremacy of rational thought when it comes to understanding reality and placing a priority on logical solutions to disputes. But its actual significance is another. As with occurrences and trends, so too must passions be analysed, though there exist no pre-packaged solutions, and the two sides to a given question cannot find a common ground until they fully inhabit each other’s thoughts. Looking at the generational conflict, which, as we have seen, is also an integral part of the environmental conflict, we can point to the example of the give and take between a parent and a child. A parent wishing to help or guide a child cannot do so from a rigid stance of rational logic, but only through the use of a newly found common language and a revival of the passion on which the paternal relationship rests. Understanding the needs and demands of a child is not the same as meeting them.

Interests, economic and otherwise, can be negotiated, but principles can only be discussed, and this can only take place if there is a shared sense of passion. Rational understanding serves merely for the choice of the language to be used in the course of the discussion. The process we are dealing with is analysed by a number of experts in sectors that only appear to be far removed from ecological issues. The latest report of the IREF (Institute of Educational Research) and the ACLI (Christian Workers Associations of Italy)¹ provides an overview of the emotional make-up feelings of Italians: roughly 50% of the population takes an indifferent, individualistic stance; roughly 20%

delegate the concerns of their conscience others, paying to be relieved of the burden; approximately 15% are involved in some form of association activity; and only 15% are truly active. The report's conclusions point to the need to bring the indifferent segment "back into play", through operations meant to heighten involvement, as the objective of the ACLI. And this is precisely the direction we are exploring with environmental issues. There can be no mistaking the allure of a time in which the wish of so many, both young and old, to "be present" beings forth a brand-new task: "strengthening and spreading civic passion as a key virtue of democracy" (Report VIII of the ACLI).

In attempting to analyse passion, we can study the emotional pulsations that lead to public demonstrations of environmental protest. Rather than the technical issues raised, which we shall set aside, seeing that they vary from case to case, we shall focus on the shared emotional underpinnings of the protestors' fervour. In doing so, we must return to a number of observations made earlier: the expectations of young people regarding the construction of a (better) world of their own, the capacity to deal with the risk involved in a totally new construction and the scale of the individual needs of young people who have grown up in the western democracies.

There is no need to enter into a discussion of life, which merits a separate discussion, but simply to understand the implications of environmental issues on society and its customs. Viewed under the broader meaning illustrated earlier, the term ecology includes the study of all relations between individuals, as well as between the individuals themselves and the reality in which they live. The term ecology has entered the working vocabulary of scholars of human psychology and behaviour, being associated with factors both real and emotional.¹ When psychologists refer to the psychology of human behaviour, they are actually analysing the element of the individual driven by passion. But what is being fought for? Towards what goal are the passions struggling? Without a doubt to change a situation of need and injustice. But certain struggles can also be undertaken to defend the status quo: to safeguard what appears to be a static reality.

A number of initial considerations can be made regarding the courage to cope with day-to-day living. Many individuals in Western societies have arrived at the point of denying destiny by exorcising change (including old age and death). Strangely enough, the static aspect of reality has become the only reality to defend with a will, and efforts to oppose change are viewed as an opportunity for denying evolution. Words such as progress, future or movement do not sit well with many people, seeing that they have also denied that it is possible to deal with uncertainty in the course of building new ecological spaces. The giddy thrill of futurism is finished. Such attitudes take concrete form through the creation of a complex system of artificial relations and ties, such as insurance and legal actions, which tend to lower the individual's sense of responsibility.

Underlying such attitudes is, once again, the enlightened utopian dream of rationalising reality, together with the absolutely predominant position of reason when it comes to the options for calculating the planning of events.

The anthropologist Deborah Lupton notes: "Today, the term 'risk' is generally used only with regard to negative or undesirable outcomes, and not when talking about potentially positive results".¹ Highly interesting studies have analysed the frequency with which this word was used between 1962 and 1966, and later between 1992 and 1997. The rise observed is exponential. The loss of audacity gives rise to catastrophic visions of future events, meaning those least likely to come to pass.

Until relatively recent times, there was definitely a fatalistic acceptance of the many accidents or misfortunes that could take place throughout anyone's life. Mothers would give birth to over ten children, knowing full well that they were bound to lose some as infants. People emigrated to America, without knowing the language, without any certainty of what the future held, on large ships jammed full of such voyagers, just like the boatloads of immigrants that reach the coasts of Europe today. It was not uncommon to die young, and the average lifespan was much lower than today, but no one held the fact to be especially oppressive.

Today the ability to face such risks is found primarily among the populations of underdeveloped countries, meaning emigrants who depart with nothing more than hope, ready for a future without a shred of certainty.

Their acceptance of fate is influenced by the culture of their country of origin. In certain countries the cultural background encourages the taking of risks, while, in others, it results in a more conservative attitude. Then there is the fundamental role played by religious education, as was shown by Max Weber: within the Christian world, the noteworthy differences between Catholic and Protestant countries have led our civilisation to develop in different forms.¹

The overall reference framework, both religious and political, definitely has an influence on the individual's upbringing, and thus on his or her willingness to take an active, leading role in life. A wide range of factors determines a person's capacity to make subjective decisions and accept individual responsibility. In the countries traditionally more inclined to self-determination, systems have arisen, over time, to defend and protect individuals and minorities. Visible in the background is the belief in the immortality of man and of his cultural constructs. The objective is to render a civilisation immortal, together with the men who built it. Centuries-old wounds are reopened: ethnic groups that have lost the upper hand demand reparations for events dating way back in history, to eras when social consciousness was nowhere near as acute as it is today. Greece wants the friezes from the Parthenon to be returned, Italy wants the Mona Lisa back, and Ethiopia demanded that Rome make restitution of an obelisk, while, at the same time, the black community demands that the wrongs of slavery be righted and Latin America looks to recover treasures removed by Spaniards and no longer traceable.

A famous story by the Tao philosopher Liu An, also known as Huai-non-tzu, illustrates the meaning of accepting one's fate, of holding that *everything ultimately takes place for the best*, by explaining how, quite often, what can appear to be misfortunes many ultimately prove to be positive situations.¹ The lesson is that the outcome of a given destiny cannot be judged on isolated events or the circumstances of the moment, but must be examined in a more farseeing perspective. Life is a

continuous trade-off between short-term benefits and those that accrue over a medium-long timeframe. Indeed, the point is the same as that made by the definitions of sustainable development considered earlier.

An old man and his son lived in an abandoned fortress by the side of a hill. Their only possession of any value was a horse.

One day the horse ran away. The neighbours can running to say how sorry they were. <<What bad luck!>> they exclaimed. <<How can you be so sure?>> asked the old man.

The next day the horse returned, bringing with it a large number of wild horses. The old man and his son closed them all inside the fenced-off paddock. The neighbours came running. <<How lucky you are!>> they cried out. <<How can you be so sure?>> asked the old man.

The day after, the son tried to ride one of the wild horses, but he was thrown off and broke a leg. As soon as they heard the news, the neighbours showed up, <<The height of bad luck!>> they moaned. <<How can you be so sure?>> asked the old man.

Another day passed, and the army marched through the town, forcing the young men of the area to join its ranks, in order to fight against the Barbarians far off in the north. Many were destined never to return. But the son could be taken, because of his broken leg.

All the various experiences offered by the present must be analysed, before a judgment can be reached on the opportunities offered by life. What may first appear as a terrible setback can ultimately prove to be a chance for growth. Quite often a traumatic experience leaves the victim and more aware, better able to face life, so that, looking back, the traumatic per se loses its tragic aspect. Schumpeter's theory of creative disaster holds that moments of crisis are those in which progress is most easily made. Daring, innovative approaches are more easily taken when there are relatively few alternatives available, meaning that problem solving demands creative thinking¹. In times of wellbeing and normality, a premium is placed on rationality, risk analysis and the assessment of consequences. But the need to address a situation of crisis lowers the

threshold of uncertainty and doubt, bringing to the fore solutions generated by emotional intelligence, meaning the heart.

And yet in defining the concept of sustainable development, explicit mention is made of the need to reconcile long-term benefits with short-term gains. Such negotiations were even referred to as Generational Accords, in the same way as occurs in the field of pension reform. Worthy of note, among the earliest definitions of sustainable development, is that found in the Brundtland Report (named after a former Norwegian Prime Minister) of 1987, entitled “Our Common Future” and drawn up by the World Commission on Development and the Environment: “Sustainable development, far from being a fixed and final situation of harmony, is rather a process of change through which the exploitation of resources, the objectives of investments, the orientation of technological development and the changes made on the institutional level are all brought in line not only with current needs, but with future ones as well”. The distance between future and present is the same as that between two generations.

There is a fundamental conceptual difference between short-term and long-term results, but the pace at which we work leaves us unable to take the latter into consideration. In contrast to the lengthening of individual lifespan, the framework of expectations has shrunk. The frenetic push forward oversteps and tramples upon the mechanisms of natural life, as well as the very harmony of the eco-system. Until just a few years ago, when large-scale industrial manufacturing was still a potent force in western societies and the service-industry sector was not yet so widespread, planning an investment with a payback period of ten to twenty years constituted a standard operation. Today, proposing a similar timeline to investors would be out of the question, even though it is anything but unrealistic for certain industrial sectors. The fact is that the mindsets of those who work in dynamic works of economic and financial services no longer accept such lengthy periods.

Only in the field of energy do long-term investments once again appear attractive, seeing that the certainty of a continuously growing demand practically guarantees the success of a given initiative. Events such as the energy crisis suffered by the State of California a few years

ago, or the blackouts that occur in summer, are explained by the overlapping of a number of contrasting factors, such as the regulation of fees and the need for investments (the long-short term dichotomy). The solutions arrived at for such crises can represent a turning point for new types of energy policies.

In the case of renewable energies, for example, it has always been difficult to draw the attention of the media to the possibility of obtaining energy not only from combustible sources, but from alternative, renewable sources that will never run out. The topic has been left in the hands of idealists belonging to environmentalist groups, many of which appeared to be pursuing dreams. Only a small number of pioneers took on the challenge of producing clean energy, and they were viewed with suspicion.

This attitude has favoured the growth of cultural symbols and the establishment of social groups around them. And such developments, in turn, have contributed to the expansion of other communities engaged in similar efforts tied to respecting Nature. In short, the transformation of the environmental question into a symbol, complete with identifiable cultural meanings, has hindered attempts to address the issue of renewable energy sources in a pragmatic manner, through a serious technical analysis. Only the blackouts brought to light the fact that the Island of Hen, near New York, was unaffected, seeing that it draws its power exclusively from renewable sources. The interruption of electric power removed the outer layer of cultural meanings that had been deposited atop the ecological movements, stripping the issue down to the technical considerations. At this point it became possible in America as well to initiate the massive financing efforts needed to carry out experimentation and research in a number of different directions, and primarily with regard to hydrogen, wind power and solar energy.

The process currently underway, in which the environmental question is separated from its ideological trappings, eliminates not only the political overtones but, even more importantly, the symbolic references to the social communities of origin. Environmentalist associations are bound to benefit from the outcome, and there is no way it can hurt them, seeing that they can easily divert attention in the direction

of other topics. Thanks to the enlargement and expansion of the meaning of the environment, it became possible to identify other issues over which points of view can be exchanged and new symbols can be created.

It is no accident that, looking at the symbols and the names of the groups displayed by the demonstrators at the recent summit of the WTO in Cancun, one finds a surprisingly wide variety of very different groups hailing from every corner of the globe: Asia, Africa, Europe. The common concern is the reconciliation of short-term and long-term solutions, meaning, in the final analysis, the struggle between generations, and thus the clash between heart and reason. But the main focus of the struggle is directed towards issues involving agriculture and trade, while topics regarding the environment per se play a relatively minor role.

The shrinking time span of expectations, together with a lengthening in the period of generational exchange, as well as the tendency to have children at a later age, have amplified these distances, channelling them in new directions. In the 1950's young people's hearts were filled with the yearning to leave home and form families of their own, while today the opposite occurs. What was once an inevitable generational clash over obtaining individual freedom has found a new outlet for manifesting the tensions that naturally accompany a transfer in decision-making power. The battle has shifted from inside the nuclear family to the outside world, in the form of street demonstrations, moving from the individual sphere to the collective dimension.

As shown by our examination of the shift in the focus of the younger generation on the Maslow scale of needs, the creation of a new set of shared cultural symbols may be their only option for establishing an identity and, in the final analysis, protesting.

But while the issue of the environment in the west can be traced back in part to a generational conflict or to the need to construct a social identity, the globalisation of relations and the ease with which information is exchanged has also brought to light a clash of civilisations. In Cancun, regardless of any judgement regarding the outcome, the event clearly provided the occasion for the birth of a trans-national community of third-world countries which, for the first time

ever, recognised shared cultural symbols. Without regard for nations or cultures of origin, it was the multiculturalism itself that marched by the gates of Cancun. The lack of uniformity of the groups gave rise to a unity made recognisable by symbols that have attained universal status.

In this case, the environmental issue has become how to manage the distribution of resource and ensure the sustainable development of the poorer nations. The environmental serves as the spark that arouses the passions, but the underlying problem is a political one. At this point, it is clear that the true environmental issue is tied to the more general concept of ecology: “The study of the functions through which organisms relate to the world around them and with each other” (the Treccani Dictionary).

6. The Error of Renewable Energies

*Life is no joke.
.....
Take it seriously,
so seriously that,
at the age of seventy, for example, you plant olive trees
and not for the sake of your children,
but because you do not believe in death,
though you fear it,
and life will weigh heavier on the scale of things.”*

(Nazim Hickmet)

So what exactly is the environmental issue? The Romans deforested large chunks of Europe in search of wood for their baths, modifying entire natural habitats. The Lucania region was named for forests that no longer exist. But today, if a tree is a potential problem for a home, negotiations with neighbourhood committees and a certificate of instability issued by an expert in the sector are necessary before it can be cut down.

A tree, however, is nothing more than a natural element inserted in an anthropised setting, and if not properly selected, in accordance with its features, it can lead to situations of reciprocal inconvenience. Why so much fervour, then, against its removal?

For that matter, is there not a law on the books requiring that a tree be planted for every child born? At that rate, we could have reforested the Lucania region!

Why does a tree alongside a home bring out people's heartfelt indignation, while no one takes the slightest notice of failure to obey a wonderful law?

If hearts are ready to struggle for a lone tree, why are they so heedless to the possibility of bringing back to life an ecosystem of forests in a faraway land? Such an attitude is the equivalent of the Nimby Syndrome¹ (not in my backyard), meaning the same mindset that makes it impossible to place thermo-combustion plants or dumping sites within the boundaries of any Italian municipality. All this while the waste problem continues to grow, calling for transparent solutions able to control its effects on the environment rather than attempts to block out the issue. For there can be no pretending that continued neglect of the problem does not fuel eco-mafia activities or lead to the pollution of third-world countries, as in the case of certain African nations that have been transformed into uncontrolled, open-air dumping sites. The end result is increased tension between cultures, as described earlier and manifested in fully developed form during the Cancun summit.

There is something wrong when it proves so difficult to heighten the awareness of hearts, and their willingness to take action, with regard to pollution in Africa, but not with respect to a sickly tree outside their homes. There is no question as to which of the two examples is more important and environmentally relevant. In the case of the tree outside the home, however, yet another trait of individuals who live on the upper levels of the Maslow Scale comes into play: the need for self-fulfilment. The yearning to be a positive example for others, especially if these others are one's own children.

The same lack of alternative ideals that leads young people to stage street protests exclusively for reasons in some way connected with the environment (including the agricultural use of land and GMOs) is perceived by parents who wish to transmit values to their children. What values should they pass on in their role as educators of the new generations? Justice, naturally. Freedom, but not in the case of everyone, seeing that such a value is too difficult to perceive, calling for a capacity for self-determination and acceptance of responsibility in individual choices. In the end, respect of the environment proves to be the most

immediate concern, the one with the greatest allure, capable of involving absolutely everyone.

A number of environmental issues are rapidly being transformed into fables and myths aimed at the younger age groups. One example is the environmental disasters caused by oil tankers, such as the incident already referred to in Galicia. There is no longer any discussion of the episode, which will not be brought up again until the next accident, but the same topic was addressed by a great writer, namely Sepulveda, in his wonderful book “Story of a Seagull and the Cat who Taught Her to Fly”⁽¹⁾, later made into an animated film. Sepulveda’s book, which rapidly became a classic of children’s literature, tells the story of a gull that dies as a result of an environmental disaster caused by an oil tanker, but manages to leave its egg in the care of a cat who brings up the baby gull and teaches it to fly: to be free. Thanks to this tale, every child is aware of the destructive potential of oil tankers and the damage they can do to Nature. Regardless of the name of the actual ship, the children associate oil tankers with a series of negative symbols. The educational capacity of stories was well known in ancient times, as shown by the role of the great Homeric poems as teaching tools. The text of the Iliad, for example, has been analysed by many scholars and can also be read as a technical manual for the illiterate scholars of ancient Greece.

Accounts of oil-tanker disasters have been transformed into fables and then myths and used to educate children on the subject. The creative fantasy and the moral of the fables reach people’s hearts, making them more effective at moulding attitudes and forms of behaviour than reports that provide scientific explanations of the disasters, illustrating them in full, down to the smallest details.

To further this educational function, a section of the Ministry of the Environment should be dedicated to parents. The fables of today are almost all tied to environmental issues, allowing parents to pass on to their children teachings that involve respect of the environment. The topic is extremely relevant to the present day, the natural outcome of the end of political conflicts over what model of government should be employed. Having put the ideals tied to the building of democracies to

rest, the hearts of young people beat passionately only over environmental policies. And parents push in this direction.

At this point, however, reason must be brought into the picture as well, seeing that use of the heart alone threatens to transform the environmental issue into a question of ideology. The uncompromising outlook of a few fundamentalists is promoting the spread of absurd fears, prohibitions and regulations, using fear as a way of reaching people's hearts. The search for a point of compromise and balance is the only way in which a pragmatic approach can be taken to certain environmental issues, including the redistribution of natural resources. By looking at things from a coolheaded, rational perspective, an understanding of the role of man in the general ecosystem can be obtained, even though that role shall never be fully comprehensible. Even if we were to succeed in describing the situation of our planet with a super-mega-hyper mathematical algorithm, we would still have to calculate the exchange of energy that occurs on a daily basis between the Earth and the Sun, as well as between the Earth and the rest of the Universe and among all the bodies of the Universe as a whole. A similar algorithm would have to account for the entire energy situation of every portion of the Universe, and this is simply impossible, given the current state of our scientific knowledge.

A number of considerations on the Sun are enough to show us how much further investigation is needed to fill the gaps in our knowledge. Starting from the unquestioned fact that life on Earth is only possible thanks to this extraordinary star, we also know that the Sun does not always shine in the same way. Galileo Galilei was the first to note the presence of solar spots, evidence of turbulence and magnetic storms that break out on the Sun's surface, significantly modifying the flows of energy that reach the earth. But all our knowledge of the Sun is inductive, consisting of confirmation of the effects we manage to observe, as opposed to direct research.

The scientific method of the mind will not settle for this level of knowledge. The Universe can only be perceived, but children must be brought up to respect the planet, without having to feel too much at fault. This time, in the give and take between reason and heart, the latter

prevails, and, fortunately, we can go on dreaming while gazing at the stars. The first point of contact between heart and passion could be sought in language, but neither in the antiseptic wording of scientific reports nor in the mythology of fables. What is needed is a form of expression that gives vent to both the search for intensity and the need to take direct action. A language that helps us be direct participants, in large part through the restoration of a direct link with the environment.

To return to the catastrophic scenarios drawn by the most unbending fanatics, there are some figures that can offset our fears. Which is not to say that we should become complaisant: the anthropisation of the planet generates imbalances capable of modifying the entire ecosystem and leading to consequences that are best avoided, such as those described in the first part. Here is why, in addition to seeking to influence major policy decisions, an effort should be made to change small-scale, micro forms of behaviour by educating people to respect the environment and the ecosystem. In the context of such initiatives, renewable energies can play a key role, penetrating people and touching their hearts.

A calming anecdote to some of the more catastrophic forecasts is provided by figures of the IEA (International Energy Agency) showing that, during the last century, the earth's population has grown fourfold, whereas the world wide GDP has increased by a factor of 20. Looking at only the last 30 years, the population has grown by 50% and the world GDP by 250%.

A study of socioeconomic conditions in the United States at the start of the last century present a set of figures from which we have excerpted the items most worthy of note:

- Average life expectancy was 47 years.
- 95% of all childbirths took place at home.
- The five most frequent causes of death were: 1) pneumonia and influenza; 2) tuberculosis; 3) diarrhoea; 4) heart disease; 5) stroke.

-
- There was no DDT and no antibiotics
 - Marijuana, heroin and morphine were freely available at any apothecary.
 - Only 14% of all homes included a bathroom, and most women washed their hair once a month, using egg yolk for shampoo.
 - Only 8 homes out of 100 had a telephone, and the cost of making calls was exorbitant.
 - There were no more than 8000 automobiles in the United States, and the entire roadway network measured only 230 Km in length.
 - Only 30 people lived in Las Vegas, and none of today's massive skyscrapers had been built: the Eiffel Tower was the world's tallest structure.
 - Average hourly pay was 22 cents.
 - Sugar cost 4 cents a pound, and coffee 15 cents (a pound is roughly 450 g).
 - A manual labourer earned between 200 and 400 dollars in a year, a dentist \$ 2500, a mechanical engineer \$ 5000.
 - 18% of United State homeowners employed at least one full-time servant.
 - Nine adults out of ten were illiterate, and only 6% of the population had a secondary-school diploma.
 - 90% of the physicians in the United States had not gone to university, but attended schools for physicians, many of which were judged to be lacking and inadequate by the government itself.

-
- In 1902 only 230 crimes were reported throughout the United States.

This was the situation in the United State a century ago, when it represented a mirage for Italian emigrants seeking to escape conditions that were even worse.

If we are unable to accept these figures and facts, then it means that we have turned ecology into a lay religion, pushing it beyond the bounds of reason and shutting off rational communications with the world, in what amounts to a pure passion. This also means no longer thinking and no longer accepting that our lives are part of a vigorous living context, such as that of the Earth and Sun. Searching for unchanging truths, for a static outlook, for an indeterminate succession of occurrences, without ever managing to entertain the idea that our forecasts might be mistaken, or that they might not fully come true, means no longer giving meaning to our ecological way of life.

On the other hand, using renewable resources as a means of educating and assisting young hearts to channel their energies in a positive, active manner, to restore their personal balance with both the natural and artificial worlds, can make a key contribution to the collective growth and development of our civilisation.

Counting on renewable energy sources to solve the ever increasing energy gap in all countries, both developed and developing, means refusing to acknowledge the reality of the situation and indulging in impossible dreams. A kilowatt/hour of solar energy is still extremely costly in absolute terms. A number of environmentalists hold that the costs of energy from fossil sources should be augmented by the medical costs tied to the negative repercussions of energy production on the health of citizens. They are right. Living near an electric power plant is not healthy. Shipping oil in dilapidated tanker ships is not prudent. Opening a nuclear power plant is a costly, risky enterprise. Transporting energy on distribution networks results in power losses and is always costly. But despite all these drawbacks, the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energies appears relatively unrealistic. There can be no

underestimating the fact that oil-based economy has led to worldwide balances of power, as well as more or less open clashes between different civilisations. But neither can we ignore that non-renewable sources, as the term itself makes clear, shall gradually decrease in quantity, with a corresponding increase in the price, in terms of both money and blood, tied to their procurement. Before long the system must reach a new balance, at which point there will be a natural inversion in the current trends, as demonstrated by the fact that today's leading investors in solar research and manufacturers of silicon cells, the basic component of photovoltaic panels, are none other than the oil companies. In the same way, the most sizeable investments in the use of hydrogen as a fuel for automobiles are being made by the established automotive manufacturers, fearful of being caught out of step with the future.

What type of role, then, can renewable sources play in our immediate future? The underlying idea is not to delude young people into thinking that a solution to the energy problem is near at hand, thanks to renewable energy sources, setting off a backlash of anger when they realise that such a dream is impossible. The Sun and wind can help us reflect on the direction in which our civilisation should evolve, what dreams and hopes we can entertain. When it comes to teaching children to respect and live in harmony with Nature, renewable sources of energy represent an extremely interesting method. The experience of the Children's Museum of Rome shows the power of attraction this topic exercises on young people.

If we return once again to the theory of humanist psychology, we can conclude that, in order to find a solution to our needs, be they primary or secondary, the needs in question must be close enough to our current state to be achievable, but, at the same time, far enough removed so that we can yearn for them. The underlying motivations for passions must be positive, concrete and verifiable. It must be possible to turn the dream into reality.

Conclusions

“Making the wellbeing of mankind the focus of interest in the environment is actually the most reliable way to safeguard creation; a similar approach renders every individual responsible for natural resources and for ensuring that they are used wisely.”

(Pope John Paul II)

When I work in the field of environmental communications, this is the concept that guides me. Renewable sources of energy are only a means of educating people and encouraging them to dream. I do not believe that the moment has come to change the oil-based economies, but I think that the repercussions of environmental efforts must start being seen as extending beyond the social sphere. The request for greater involvement on the part of individuals is becoming a need for direct action. By closely observing the ongoing development of accepted thought on the environmental question, the sociological evolution of western societies can be traced.

We can divide the history of society into three phases: modern, individualist and post-individualist. These are not periods of equal length, and while the initial periods start from the time of the industrial revolutions, the second is relatively recent and starts with the end of ideologies, while the third, which is still underway, starts from the economic crises and the rise of globalisation. The post-individual phase could also be identified with the term *glocalisation*, the counterpart of

globalisation, with which it exists in a symbiotic, mutually fuelled relationship.

During the first phase, the modern era, the environment and its infinite power are taken as givens, and natural catastrophes are considered part of a broader, ungovernable process. The acts of man are held to have no influence on such a vast realm, making it impossible to draw any type of individual connection to the specific processes at work. In short, there was no way of pinpointing who was responsible for a given disaster. Under the effect of such convictions, major environmental abuses could be committed, right up through the 1970's, to the utter indifference of the general public. The most noteworthy instances of pollution began following the large-scale industrialisation of the post-war era, when there was already sufficient scientific knowledge to understand the violence being done, but there was no awareness of the fragility of the ecosystem. Nature was believed to be capable of absorbing any imbalances and allowing everything to go on as before.

The manifest inability of the environment to recover stability in the short run led to individual awareness of the problem, together with legislation meant to aid Nature in its attempts to adjust to the demands of ever increasing anthropisation. The 80's witnessed the organisation of the first government units specifically assigned to defend and safeguard Nature and stop polluters. The very concept of pollution came into being, seeing that the term no longer referred to a mere disturbance of the natural status quo, but to its destruction.

We are in an individualistic phase, and the number of people taking an active part in the battle is still limited, so that they take on the role of either "scourges" or "heroes", depending on one's point of view. During these evolutionary changes, the sense of individual awareness and responsibility becomes more acute, and an effort is made to identify the parties guilty for the environmental disasters registered from time to time. We are in the 80's, a period in which Western society as a whole is initiating processes of deregulation and transferring the power to govern, in certain sectors, from the State to the private sector. At the same time there is a focus – and quite often an exaggerated one – on the capabilities of the individual (for both good and bad).

The dispersal of the established ideals of the West, a side effect of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the evaporation of the tension that constituted a powerful social bond, has also favoured the drift towards individualism. Ideals have been artificially replaced by individual dreams not suited for sharing by collective structures, or even, all too often, by nuclear families.

During this phase, which can also be considered rather materialistic and cynical, the heroes of the first environmental battles brought into being cultural symbols. This development was definitely facilitated by the fact that struggles to defend the environment often pitted individuals with little strength against massive multinational corporations, meaning economic groups of daunting size and power. As with David against Goliath, apart from David's reasons for fighting, the spectator's emotional focus is on the meagre simplicity of the slingshot and the stone, as opposed to the awesome might of the giant. And in the case of Robin Hood, who can resist pulling for him as he fights the greedy Prince John and the entire English state?

What takes place inside the early environmentalist groups is the sharing of dreams, which opens the way to post-individualism. Possession is taken of new collective cultural symbols able to take the place of the ideals of the past. Along with the globalisation of merchandise, the ever increasing rapidity of movement and the ease of trans-national communications, dozens, hundreds, thousands of small and large-scale non-government organisations were born, becoming actively engaged in many sectors. The "Doctors without Borders" association has even won the Nobel Peace Prize, but environmentalist associations play no less of a role in our contemporary history. The Cancun summit failed (or was a success) primarily on account of the assistance given by many non-government organisations to developing countries. In a certain sense, the behind-the-scenes activities led the demonstrations in Cancun to mirror the struggles underway within western society. Generational battles were brought back to centre-stage, along the yearning of post-individualist man to return to a sense of community and shared dreams.

But a closer look reveals another transformation in the course of social evolution: that from victimised outlook to an activist approach. Those who form associations of volunteers (it makes no difference whether they focus on social or environmental causes) want to leave behind the phase of accepting reality as is and begin making a difference.

The language of the younger generations has changed, as the old, stratified social frameworks have been left behind. Failure to perceive these ongoing developments only increases the social and generational gaps, breaking traditional ties. An example can be found in the sector of architecture and culture. Statistics tell us that fewer and fewer young people visit museums, though, and the same time, expositions featuring contaminations of different idioms and actualised visions of the past attract crowds. Furthermore, the most frequently visited European cities, Berlin, Barcelona and Bilbao, all feature significant and recent modifications in their urban frameworks, including major new examples of modern architecture.

The problem is not the commitment of young people, but rather the capacity to establish processes of intercultural communication. The rigidity of certain schools of thought threatens to stifle a number of forms of intergenerational dialogue, resulting in pointless conflicts.

The environmental issue must be addressed with a new language, in the awareness that it can be used to reconstruct strong bonds within our society. And the language, naturally, cannot be that of reason, but must come from the heart. Only by moving forward to the symbolic-cultural sphere, only by employing passion, can the setting for a fruitful contrast be restored. The risk is that there will be another 10, 100, 1000 Cancuns without any progress being made towards constructing the future of the planet. A book such as that written by the environmentalist Bjorn Lomborg¹ could, unfortunately, become a symbol to hold up against those already part of ecological movements: rather than promoting dialogue, it reinforces distances. And this without judging the merits of what the author says, but merely the way in which he attempts to establish intercultural communications. It is written with reason and does not penetrate to the heart. It gives rise to very intense academic

discussions, but does not ignite passions. Whereas, in the final analysis, the environmental issue is also one of language.

This brief monologue got underway after I had seen a commercial produced by the Ministry of the Environment to explain how water should be saved and the need to waste less of it. There was no love. It was artificial. How can you make the mistake of informing citizens of the need to reduce improper uses of water by talking only to their heads and not their hearts?

The head was already the target audience for all those news reports monitoring the waters of the Po River as they fell inch by inch. The obsessive bulletins should have been offset by a campaign of awareness aimed at people's hearts, at young people and children. Only in this way can emotions be awakened, leading to changes in the habits of a lifetime.

But what left me most indignant was a scene in which a pseudo engineer wearing a helmet was shown next to a water-supply pipe. I have never come across such a clean professional in real life. At worksites, all of us are dirty. The water joins the dirt and gives birth to mud that latches onto everything it finds in its path, like a parasite. An engineer at a water-purification plant can be clean, but in the background of this scene there was a lake and mud.

Without heart, there is no way of reaching people's hearts. If someone actually consumed less water after seeing that commercial, then they should be taken aside and examined, subjected to tests and analyses of their brainwaves. Assuming they have not been lobotomised, it would be the scientific rarity of survival of a species without the use of the heart.

Punta Perotti is an obscene sight for those who, like myself, love the Apulia region, but also for all those with a minimum of aesthetic taste. Anyone who has been brought up to admire the harmony and grace of the paintings of Leonardo, Raphael or Michelangelo will be unable to hold back a cry of pain on seeing this skeleton. There is no need to be

environmentalists, or to appeal to the principles of ecology, but simply to have a little plain common sense.

If the Ministry of Culture has a department of contemporary architecture and promotes a law to improve the quality of the buildings constructed in our cities, then it should also pass a law favouring the demolition of eyesores: eyesores and not eco-monsters.

Eco-monsters can be handled by the Ministry of the Environment, but Punta Perotti is an offence to the civilisation and the culture of the Apulia region. It is an offence to Italian traditions, but not a threat to the survival of the inhabitants of Bari, or of southern Italy or of the world.

For Punta Perotti to become a battle cry of environmental struggles is a sign of a rather worrisome confusion. It is also a sign of insufficient effort to understand the level of the needs of citizens in the upper segments of the Maslow pyramid.

The environmental question should be viewed apart from ideological considerations and brought back to a focus on topics of shared interest. Only in this way can the step from “words to facts” be made, with the energies and passions of young hearts channelled towards making their dreams come true. What is needed to achieve increased harmony between man and the environment is a healthy pragmatism freed from demagoguery.

This does not mean laying dreams to rest, but rather, in the words of Abdul Kalam (a poet-scientist and the current President of India), “Dreaming, dreaming, dreaming. Because it is a crime to have small dreams!”.

Where there is a righteousness heart, there is a beautiful character.

Where there is a beautiful character, there is a happy home.

Where there is a happy home, there is an orderly nation.

And were there is an orderly nation, there is peace in the world.

Kalam has singled out the connection between heart and character as the path towards building a world in harmony. The environment can serve as an occasion for reconstructing the dialogue

between the governed and those who govern, in the same way as contact is restored between parents and children. It makes no difference whether progress towards environmental respect is made in the way that the Boy Scouts or the volunteers of the Environmental League propose, as long as the effort does not mask other, exclusively political considerations.

Now that the major revolutions regarding the ways in which the state is to be structured are over and done with, at least in the Western world, where the system of democratic alternation is firmly established, and where any fear of rightwing or leftwing totalitarian regimes is a thing of the past, respect of the environment can become the issue on which to found a new idea of the state. In a broad sense, environmental issues range from respecting to using the planet's resources, but also include civic education, a redistribution of wealth and honesty in government.

In this way the environment can be used to discuss moral ideas, together with the shared political and economic tenets that constitute the true wealth of nations. A people no longer interested in debating such topics belongs to a civilisation on the decline. It is dreams and ideas that make a people grow, fuelling its prosperity.

And this is all the more so in western societies, where economic wellbeing is increasingly tied to the so-called *Economy of Knowledge*, meaning the returns provided by trademarks, patents and creativity.¹ Production activities in the traditional sense have been delocalised to emerging countries, where labour costs are lower, while the developed world has retained management and related activities, meaning all the conceptual work tied to developing creativity and turning out ideas. It is no coincidence that bookstores and the Internet offer an increasingly wide variety of books and sites on how to cultivate the creativity of individuals, workgroups and companies. Little wonder that companies have established in-house *Idea Banks* that are rapidly becoming more important than Swiss banks.

In general terms, our way of life is shifting from a system based on possession to one centred around use: what Jeremy Rifkin refers to as the "era of access".¹ This policies of major states also follow this logic to an increasing extent. The trend is towards "light empires" that rule

without dominating, as described by Michel Ignatieff.¹ Wars are become lightweight, rapid and efficient. Post-war period a bit less so.

And in this new, *light* world, is ideas disappear, then everything else does as well. If hearts stop dreaming, is passion lies dormant, then civilisation has no chance of surviving. If a disaster like that of the Prestige of the Galicia coast becomes old news in just a few weeks' time, if the War in Afghanistan is forgotten following the agitation of the election period, if the injustice still at work throughout the world is accepted, then maybe it is best that a new civilisation come forward and take the upper hand. It would not be the first time that the world witnesses the decline of great empires, and certainly not the last.

Premise

¹Schumpeter J.A., *Teoria dello sviluppo economico*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1977.

²Kole K.C., *L'universo e la tazza da tè. Verità e bellezza della matematica*, Longanesi, Milano, 1999.

³Merton R.K., *Teoria e struttura sociale*, Vol.II, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1970.

⁴ ?

⁵Pincherle M., *La vera storia di Sargon di Accadia*, M.I.R. Edizioni, Firenze.

⁶Douglas A., *La vita, l'universo e tutto quanto*, Mondatori, Milano, 1984.

-
- ⁷Laplace P.S., *Saggio filosofico sulle probabilità*, UTET, Torino, 1967.
- ⁸Dahrendorf R., *Classi e conflitti di classe nella società industriale*, Laterza, Bari, 1963.
- ⁹Ignatieff M., *Una ragionevole apologia dei diritti umani*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2003.
- ¹⁰Goleman D., *Lavorare con intelligenza emotiva*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2000.
- ¹¹Klein N., *No Logo, economia globale e nuova contestazione*, Baldini & Castoldi, Milano, 2001.

Chapter one

- ¹²Solow R.M., *Lavoro e Welfare*, Edizioni di Comunità, Turin, 2001.
- ¹³Goleman D., *Intelligenza emotiva*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1999.
- ¹⁴Roda R., Segnalini O., *Riqualificare le città e il territorio*, Il Sole 24 Ore, Milan, 2001.
- ¹⁵Duyvendak J.J.L. (edited by), *Tao tê ching. Il libro della Via e della Virtù*, Adelphi edizioni, Milan, 2002.
- ¹⁶Talone C., *Il territorio negoziato*, Alinea editrice, Florence, 1999.
- ¹⁷Pizzaiole G., Micarelli R., *L'arte delle relazioni*, Alinea editrice, Florence, 2003.
- ¹⁸Cauo G., Palazzo A., *Comunicare l'urbanistica*, Alinea editrice, Bologna, 2000.

Chapter Two

- ¹⁹Bennett M.J. (edited by), *Principi di comunicazione interculturale*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2002.
- ²⁰Anzaldù G., *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- ²¹Hall E., *Il linguaggio silenzioso*, Garzanti, Milan, 1972.
- ²²Griswold W., *Sociologia della cultura*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997.

-
- ²³Berger P.L., *Homo Ridens, la dimensione comica dell'esperienza umana*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1999.
- ²⁴Master Lam Kam Chuen, *Il manuale del Feng Shui*, ed. Corbaccio, Milan, 2000.
- ²⁵Capra F., *Il Tao della fisica*, Adelphi, Milan, 1989.
- ²⁶Damasio A., *L'errore di Cartesio*, Adelphi, Milan, 1995.
- ²⁷Le Corbusier, *La casa degli uomini*, Jaka Book, Milan, 1984 (1943).
- ²⁸Redfield J., *La profezia di Celestino*, Corbaccio, Milan, 1994.
- ²⁹Lazzara S., *Conoscenze condivise*, Manifestolibri, Rome, 2003.

Chapter Three

- ³⁰Maslow A., *Motivazione e personalità*, Armando, Rome, 1954.
- ³¹Kundera M., *Amori ridicoli*, Adelphi, Milan, 1994.
- ³²Sen A., *Sviluppo è libertà*, Mondadori, Milan, 2000.
- ³³Bennett M.J., (*see note...*)
- ³⁴Ferrarotti F., *Un imprenditore di idee. Una testimonianza su Adriano Olivetti*, Edizioni di Comunità, Turin, 2001.
- ³⁵Muhammad Y., *Il banchiere dei poveri*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2000.
- ³⁶Fedro, *Favole* (edited by S. Tommassini), Zara ed., Parma, 1996.
- ³⁷Esopo, *Favole*, Bur, Milan, 1979-1994.
- ³⁸Piaget J., *La psicologia dell'intelligenza*, Ed. Universitarie, Florence, 1955.
- ³⁹Lazzara S., (*see note..*)
- ⁴⁰Herrigel E., *Lo zen e il tiro con l'arco*, Adelphi, Milan, 1996.
- ⁴¹Griswold W., (*see note*)
- ⁴²Golding W., *Il signore delle mosche*, Mondadori, Milan, 1983.
- ⁴³Borges J. L., *L'Aleph*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1977.

Chapter Four

-
- ⁴⁴Lupton D., *Il rischio: percezione, simboli, culture*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003.
- ⁴⁵Stiglitz J.E., *In un mondo imperfetto. Mercato e democrazia nell'era della globalizzazione*, (Pennacchi L., edited by), Donzelli, Rome, 2001.
- ⁴⁶Sen A., (*see note...*)
- ⁴⁷Habermas J., Taylor C., *Multiculturalismo*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2003.
- ⁴⁸Taylor C.,?
- ⁴⁹Berger P., Luckmann T., *La realtà come costruzione sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002.
- ⁵⁰Beck U., *Un mondo a rischio*, Einaudi, Turin, 2003.
- ⁵¹Pennac D., *Signor Malaussè*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2003.
- ⁵²Berger P.L., (*see note..*)
- ⁵³Vicari S., *Creatività dell'impresa: tra caso e necessità*, Etaslibri, Milan, 1998.
- ⁵⁴Piaget J., (*see note..*)

Conclusion

- ⁵⁴Lomborg B., *L'ambientalista scettico*, Saggi Mondadori, 2003.
- ⁵⁴Steward T.A., *La ricchezza del sapere*, Ponte alle grazie, Milan, 2002.
- ⁵⁴Rifkin J., *L'era dell'accesso*, Mondadori, Milan, 2002.
- ⁵⁴Ignatieff M., *Impero light, dalla periferia al centro del nuovo ordine mondiale*, Carocci Editore, Rome, 2003.