

## CHRONICLE OF A PRE-ANNOUNCED APOCALYPSE

### *Analysis regarding the Crisis of COVID-19*

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These are not moments for dissertations on art, or, at any rate, for granting priority to them, but rather for reflecting on the dramatic situation in which the inhabitants of the universe, are living. For that reason, on this occasion, I shall only transmit to you my thoughts on the present crisis of covid 19.

I leave for a later analysis the consequences that may be felt on the world of culture and specially on the way Art should react on being faced by this challenge which should be interpreted as a unique opportunity for giving a qualitative leap upwards at an artistic level in accordance with the regeneration which must take place in the economic, social and political environment.

In a previous blog written in March, I conclude manifesting with a shade of premonition Voltaire's words "il faut cultiver notre jardin".

Although it was only at its preliminary stages, I didn't suspect the vast dimension and transcendency of the storm which the pandemia of the coronavirus SARS-COV-2 was driving down on the world and destroying our way of life.

The virulence with which it has spread, the dramatic intensity of the number of deaths and how it is reaping harvests with our aged people, the sensation of humiliation that we all without exception are suffering on seeing ourselves stripped of our fundamental rights, together with the consternation that such a situation may occur in a society supposedly advanced and not immune; all this has caught us so unawares that we scarcely managed to react, accepting, for fear of the unknown, what is a radical and sudden change in our customs and habits as if it were a lesser evil.

A change imposed by a government which should be guided by a leader to whom we may demand efficiency in the fight against the pandemic and responsibility if he invades our rights, but at the same time who does not weaken in his courage in his decisions, no matter how unpopular they may be; a Churchillian personality, a father figure, open-minded, sincere, communicative, convincing, backed by a technical cabinet who should order us to make efforts, but at the same time must transmit to us confidence that he is determined by his correct decisions to get us out of this critical situation. Unfortunately, few of the western statesmen have been equal to the task of solving the problems. The only exceptions are the Portuguese Antonio Costa, Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo and the Prime Minister of Germany, Angela Merkel.

The absence of foresight, of any order of priorities, the improvisation, the delay in making and carrying out decisions have been the normal standard of activity of rulers who scarcely have been able to hide their absolute inefficiency behind the flood of advice and information of committees of scientists and technologists who act in their service. The latter, logically, recommend absolute and almost perpetual quarantine as the surest method that enables the governments to shield themselves for fear of not being able to confront the virus with sufficient arms which can only be health ones of protection and detection of the virus.

In consequence, we should feel no complex in declaring that the government is responsible for guaranteeing to us another solution which is not the absolute paralization of our economy and of our social relations, because if carried to extreme degree, the remedy can be worse than the sickness. No doubt, health enjoys definite priority, but we must not fail to be conscious that the more days we remain in quarantine, the more difficult it will be for us to escape from the economic crisis which is about to fall upon us; this is something which raised to an international scale may mean a complete change in the world order of economic power, based on the winners and the losers. We cannot ignore many of the threats which undoubtedly exist nowadays such as the bankruptcy of states, the failure to pay pensions, the collapse of the banking system, the breaking up of the UE and even, though it may seem to us completely unlikely, the decline of democratic systems of government in favour of much more personalised forms of rule, or some sort of totalitarian government.

We cannot delay even one day more than is strictly necessary the end of quarantine because we are risking the survival of our business firms, the employment of millions of workers, and, though many find it hard to admit it, even our welfare state could die out. Arguments that the outbreak of the epidemic may become more severe in winter are not convincing because the disease probably will increase in particular moments until a vaccine is discovered and the pandemic is bound to show a rise during the so-called “desescalada” (climbing down) and the proliferation of the highly needed tests. Yet, precisely on account of this, because the virus does not lose its virulence with the passing of time, an absolute quarantine, not a selective one, is not a solution which can be imposed for a long time; governments must use the time that all the citizens, with our efforts, have been giving them, to guarantee health services in accordance with modern life and to enable the state to face another possible attack of the virus, massifying the tests and directing some factories to the mass-production of medical masks and gloves, just as one would do during a war-time economy. . We cannot allow rulers to prolong the periods in which absolutely exceptional measures are in force with the excuse that they would benefit public health; we have to realize that it is a very dangerous precedent to impose a semi-totalitarian regime which can ruin our economy and convert the individual into a dummy subservient to the state. In this case not only shall we have to study the whys and wherefores of this pandemic, but also how far was it necessary to sacrifice the rights of the citizens and to what extent is the government responsible for having prolonged the collapse of our economy due to its evident incapacity.

All of us who were born after the 50s have lived in an altogether privileged society due to not having been affected at any moment by a sensation of Apocalypse that most of the former generations have lived through on some occasion or other. We have, no doubt, had political crises, like those caused by the cold war, the fear of the outbreak of an atomic bomb war, and economic crises like the one of petroleum in '73, that of the subprime mortgages in 2007 and the one of the puncture of the dotcom's bubble in 2000, but wars as such, we haven't experienced nor lived through a fatal pandemic, such as the one our ancestors lived through at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

The modern world, steeped in unrestrained galloping mass consumption since the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, has turned us all into spoilt human beings, well protected by the welfare state, into individuals

contented with ourselves, endowed with much technical skill, but rather childish and lacking in sensitivity in our analysis of matters viewed as a whole. We have become very demanding citizens, but most of us have not made any effort to reach a state of material fullness which we all, to a greater or lesser extent, enjoy; we consider that it is thanks to a universal right which the states must protect at all cost. We all consider ourselves equal as inhabitants of advanced societies, with the right to work, to travel during our holidays, to be the owners of one house, as well as of another house for the vacations, to have the most sophisticated mobile phones, to wear clothes of well known brands, to go out to have drinks, and to have a big, crowd-attended wedding. If we don't dispose of sufficient money for all this, the financial system would provide the funds and organize the way of convincing us that everything functions correctly. Very few, only those who are excluded, will find themselves prevented from taking part in this state of affairs which we feel is an important part of life itself. Internet swamps us with proposals for consumption, most of them responding to our desires, tastes and hobbies, as we are closely watched by the most surprising technical systems. Although we severely criticize the system which most of us really consider incorrect, corrupt and inefficient, nevertheless we feel safeguarded and we blindly trust it, not paying attention to all the threats which hide behind. Like Pangloss in "Candide", we just place our confidence in the future and cannot imagine that some time everything may change; that is our great error as a society. Our rulers give absolute priority in their values to maintaining at all costs the material fullness which is the principal feature of our society. Some governments are more social and others appear to be more keen on promoting the market and business, but all of them give priority to taking care that the social masses maintain the level of consumption which the system itself requires so as to continue functioning correctly. Thus, in spite of the various crises which have occurred, at no moment has the individual nor the social masses, and even less their leaders, have doubted that the system one day may collapse. Everything seems to us guaranteed and when a change happens, it is never of substantial importance, always following the same course established by the system.

Yet, since the attack on the Twin Towers of New York in September 2001, the world has shown indubitable symptoms of breaking down; it has become less foreseeable and protective; that is what the individual feels and thus has begun to claim what he considers the ruin of his human rights. The world was scared when it viewed on television the airplanes passing over the skyscrapers of New York and to some extent the crashing

down of the buildings could be interpreted as a sign of the falling down of the Western World. In spite, however, of the series of attacks by Al Qaeda and the spreading of yihadist ideas throughout the Islamic states, the individual forgot with relative ease and, after a few years of tightening his belt, continued on his eternal routine. Later on, the world was caught by the stock exchange crack of the dotcom business firms and in 2007 by the subprime mortgages when the financial world collapsed in an instant with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. This carried away the savings of many families and brought in consequence the rescue of Mediterranean economies. All this was doubtless foreseeable, but no one was able to halt it in time, and afterwards no one dared to control a system fundamentally corrupted by a craving for excessive profit, speculation, institutionalised deceit and the fraudulent manipulation of standards and rules. The system adapted the legislation to the new requirements and continued to function basically just the same. At the end of the first decade of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, the outbreak of a series of civil wars in Africa and the Middle East, the Arabia Spring of 2010 in Egypt, Libia, Tunes, Argelia.... together with the bloody wars in Siria and Irak drove hordes of immigrants to Europe, threatening the social balance of the continent and creating the rise of ultra-right wing political parties which in certain European countries seized the majority vote , due to discontent and the weakening of the traditional parties for their lack of communication with the people. All of this culminated in Great Britain slamming the door on Europe with its Brexit, a situation no one could ever have imagined happening before and which will end being a secondary event in the year 2020; in Spain, always different, with the appearance of a Catalan nationalism transformed suddenly into independence, and in France, ever revolutionary, with the outburst of the “yellow waistcoats” who denounced the indifference of the “establishment” towards the countryside and the provincial cities of France.

Last year, all of us who treasure in our heart a certain measure of sensitivity were seized by a terrible foreboding of disaster when we viewed on television Notre Dame of Paris burning and enveloped in flames and swirling smoke: Notre Dame, a symbol of our western soul. How could something like that occur in a world so full of regulations and protocols of safety? The numerous passers-by who were absorbed in contemplation of the Cathedral in flames were the same people as those who are now quarantined in Paris due to the pandemia which is overrunning the world. No one could escape his astonishment; we all of us felt deep sorrow and anguish because something of our souls was buried deep under the

cinders of Notre Dame: our confidence that we were still the worthy bearers of our western values.

Like a divine sign, the 96 m. Spire of Viollet-Le-Duc plunged down before our eyes, just like the Twin Towers of Manhattan, but nevertheless none of these signs were sufficiently clear to warn the leading classes that something had to change, that our civilization was in danger. The social masses, in spite of their discontent, continued trusting that the system would never collapse and the political leaders, keen on maintaining their political party followers contented, have preferred to conceal the real situation and directed their attention towards short-term goals which could easily fascinate voters. None of these leaders has wished to get to grips with fundamental problems: that of how to pay pensions, immigration, the lack of unity in EU decisions when faced with crucial situations, the problem of nationalism, the increasing poverty of provincial towns, the exaggerated growth of administration. These problems are still there, unsolved, and have only been parked tidily away, but they have become ever more difficult to manage, without predicting that the situation may suddenly get worse with the appearance of a “black swan”, something absolutely unforeseen and not calculated.

Everything therefore appeared to be conspiring together so that something of a universal and inexorable nature should break out clashing into the system and, for the first time in this century affecting in a direct, radical and immediate way all human beings of all races, nations and classes. The repeated lack of foresight by those who govern us, and our “panglossianism”, combined with a world ever more global, have been the ideal breeding ground that has produced what many scientists had foreseen as one of the great inherent threats to a universe so interrelated as our own: a fatal pandemia. This is a natural phenomenon that has laid waste entire nations and has devastated millenary civilizations.

At the beginning of January there came the first news that in China, another great menace for the West, a virus, the coronavirus SARS-COV-2, was spreading rapidly. The Chinese government declared states of alert and the quarantine of entire regions; we saw on television how families were separated by force from some of the members of their families. All this surprised us enormously, but no one paid any more attention to the news than to any earthquake or tidal wave occurring in a distant land. No country inaugurated protocols to serve as protection, nor did the OMS send out clear warnings of the risk of a pandemia; and so the virus in less

than two months put the whole universe on its knees. Towards the end of February, in Italy people thought the virus was like influenza; a week later, all Lombardy was put in quarantine and the children were forbidden to go to school; now one began to hear with terror that in the Italian UCIS patients were selected according to their age, an indication that was already included in the medical protocols of the Intensive the Health Service, but which no one knew, nor imagined could exist in a society so protective as our own. Our ignorance of what was a Health crisis was absolute.

Now, after two months of pandemia, with over 2.500.000 people affected and almost 200.000 dead, with our economy closed down, the population in quarantine, the government in full power, but overwhelmed by events, giving priority to human life rather than to economy; what is left to us of that state of material fullness that we mentioned at the beginning, when our most prized force, our liberty, has been cut down in such a way?

Suddenly, we have ceased contacting with older people, stopped going to school, or to the university, enjoying an evening with friends, or to go shopping, travel is out and the Museums are closed. There are no sports events or concerts. All direct social contact has been cancelled and we don't know when it will all begin again; we cannot foresee until when the state will continue intervening and controlling us with the declared purpose of protecting us. The only thing we clearly understand is that for the first time we feel afraid, afraid to go out, to decide on our own what we want to do, to express our affections, and for that reason we give way to these rules to cut down our liberty imposed by the government which could ruin our future prospects. We, however, think that some time or other things will become again like what they were in the past and that is precisely our error. If we wish to rise victorious from this challenge, we must assume as individuals, whether workers or heads of business enterprises, that nothing will be the same as before, if the world really wishes to advance. We must react, undertaking a rise in quality at all levels, questioning what previously seemed to us permanent and eternal truths and revealing many of the gaps in the system which appears to be in decline.

What lessons can we learn from this harsh experience?

The first and fundamental one is that we must try to learn to identify the problems of our time, how far they can affect us and have an objective

opinion on them. We must raise our interest and sensitivity for public affairs; also enquire how the system is organised and how it affects us in our private sphere. We cannot continue enjoying the state of material fullness that the system gives us, as if it were “manna”, without to some extent trying to understand and maintain it. This will sharpen our capacity of foresight as individuals, will make us think less about our personal problem and more on how we may contribute towards solving the problems of society, if only by our vote and taxes. In this respect, if what has become evident is the lack of a health system in accordance with our population and nowadays’ health challenges, we should in consequence reason out the problem and accept that part of our resources should with priority be directed towards this end. It is not only a question of the State which indeed has to organize efficiently its resources, it is something that should be included amongst our personal priorities. On the other hand, we must be conscious that the State can become bankrupt, its pensions system may not be sufficiently well guaranteed; for that reason we may have to make individual sacrifices so that it may be sustainable. We cannot admit that political parties and governments, for purely electoral reasons, do not dare to treat this problem nor can they either propose, as in Spain, for the same reasons, questions like a minimum permanent subsistence wage, unless they have a clear idea how it will be financed and to what extent it could affect the distribution of resources throughout the country. We must be capable of distinguishing between a populist government and one that is simply responsible for its acts as a manager of public affairs. Furthermore, we cannot believe that the state of fullness, which we shall soon bitterly miss, can be recovered without the combined efforts of businessmen and workers and never, of course, by encouraging the passivity of our citizens, but rather, on the contrary, rewarding hard work and their capacity for assuming risk.

We must, on the other hand, value governments for their efficacy and not so much for their ideology, which, in this moment of crisis, is of secondary importance. In this respect, it is evident that once the pandemic is over, society will judge how each government has acted by the results obtained and by its way of communicating with the people. The demagogic governor, who is normally the most preoccupied by his image, will have to be guided by purely ideological criteria and will have centred his management in protecting the least favoured citizens, delaying unpleasant medium and long-term decisions; the Machiavellian governor is the most dangerous one for the common people because he usually captivates them with demagogic wiles, and uses the pandemic to his advantage so as



to maintain himself perpetually in power, stripping the individual of all his resources and opportunities in order to subsidize him with a minimum wage which enables him to survive without working, and thus become his saviour, adding him for ever to his faithful voters. The technocrat will have treated the situation with the "sang-froid" and the technique of a surgeon who encounters a patient in crisis, but perhaps he may have been lacking in communication with the people; the good statesman will be the one who, advised by efficient technicians, has adopted adequate measures early, and acts with forceful resolution so as to assure the people a high level of security , covering all the aspects of protection of health against the catastrophic effects of the pandemic. These measures will inevitably demand sacrifices from everyone, but only those sacrifices considered truly justified and really necessary should be imposed and their temporary nature must be clearly explained, so that everyone may understand that there is hope for the future when the epidemic is defeated and sacrifices are no longer necessary; furthermore, although it may be true that autocratic systems, like Russia and China, are more resolute and effective during times of crisis, it is no less certain that our rights and freedom as well as our sociocultural wealth are much more guaranteed under western style regimes. In periods of crisis and even more in the periods following a crisis, the danger rises up from seductive sirens chanting songs of populist parties who try to captivate us with demagogic speeches. All the deficiencies of political models, the lacks of the nations and of international organizations are going to appear. Comparisons are going to be made of the policies which have allowed certain countries more than others to be better prepared to confront this setting. There will be arguments regarding the response of the EU , at first always unpleasant and rather stingy, though later changed into that of an inconvenient saviour of disadvantaged economies and probably the leadership of the United States might begin to decline with the rise of a new world order; everything will depend on its capacity to react. Thus, from this chaos will surge up winners and losers. Since the pandemic, however, has affected so directly the citizen, the latter must question, with all freedom and no prejudice, the system that has led us to such a collapse and wonder how the political models have behaved facing a challenge of this magnitude. The individual is the one who suffers it and precisely from the individual must rise the regeneration of the system.

Finally, it is natural that we appreciate more what we have missed most during our quarantine: the lack of human relations, of affectionate contact with the older members of the family and with friends. We realise that

virtual relations do not satisfy us in the same way at all. We have learnt that it is not sufficient to chat, that the warm feeling lies in companionship and what makes it true is the warmth of the affection and the possibility to express it freely. It is certainly commented in our work environment that we are trending towards teleworking. No doubt this should be a temporary solution that allows one to synchronize work with family tasks, but in the long run we cannot reduce our social life to the family nucleus. Here we encounter the danger of favouring a serious problem which has risen up in modern society: solitude. The solitude of old people, of broken marriages, of the young unmarried. As a result, the tendency to work at home, and to encourage telematic relations for fear of having closer human relations, should not be an alternative to work at the office but rather an addition to it. The way to rise successfully out of this crisis is precisely to overcome fear, adapting ourselves to the new precautions and customs, wearing mask and antiseptic gel, respecting minimum distances between persons, accepting that temperatures be taken and tests be made periodically, definitely agreeing to all these measures, but not renouncing to what most distinguishes us as human beings; our capacity to communicate with one another, show enthusiasm when we are grouped together, our love of dancing, of listening to music in company with others, enjoying after-dinner conversation with pleasant company, and practising team sports. The governor had better not imagine, if he is so out of contact with reality, that the individual will renounce to all these pleasures; however long the confinement may last, and however strict the rules may be, the individual will all the more need to communicate with other people and express his feelings. We are all of us going to do what we most like doing, go on long walks, visit museums, do tourism in the environment of our city or country....

The good governor in times of crisis, the leader, is the one who knows how to transmit hope and is aware of his limits. He therefore should , as soon as the pandemia has reached the point of recession, guarantee clearly the rules and conditions to be followed by the various sectors of activity, marking a reasonable transitional term in each case; he will have to explain how these modifications should develop, but never exclude from these changes any of the sectors which are essential to our economy and to the mental health of the individual, such as leisure, tourism, culture, and sport, even at the risk of another surge up of the pandemia. Because there will be a moment when the individual will lose his fear and will feel again the joy of living and it won't be easy to cut down his

freedom. Just as the governor must likewise protect health with an adequate Public System, he must channel and not limit this joy of living that we are all going to feel again, since there lies the key to our recovery. Because sooner or later, the vaccine will be found, or we shall be rendered immune and life will go on.

The Chinese, our rivals, swamp us with images which prove that life is returning to a certain degree of normality, the commercial centres, the museums, the discos are open, but function under rigid conditions, though they give us the sensation that they have come back to life and, no doubt, seem to wish to teach us a lesson, but we mustn't let them win the game! Our civilization, our way of life can overcome this disaster with courage, rejecting any temptation to fall back into totalitarianism. We must trust in our capacity to react , demonstrating this time that, after a period of crisis ,that we are capable of regenerating ourselves and, inspired by the roots of our western culture, that we are able to give a great leap up to the high level required by modern society.

The man without project is like a bird lacking wings. He may survive for a while, but will never be able to fly again; what is the use of caring for his health if he is condemned to a wretched existence and to no longer be himself ?

And so the world will rise up again from the unbearable levity of being, just as the Phoenix rises from its ashes...