

1. In the horizon, the question of human survival

There is no point in avoiding it anymore: the awareness of living on the edge of disaster is pervading the whole society in Europe as well as in Japan. That feeling is not related with one particular issue. It is merely about human survival.

Two overwhelming facts justify such a concern: the nuclear threat and the ecological bomb. The nuclear threat is alive in the deployment of European-based missiles, in the nuclear tests in the Pacific region, as well as in the ambivalent attitude both Europe and Japan have manifested in dealing with the SDI proposal. The ecological bomb is moving fast towards its trigger moment - the devastation of the environment caused by the acid rains, the debate about the real causes of those rains as well as the drastic, even terrifying climatic changes foreseeable in the near future, seem to have become facts upon which we have lost all control.

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My basic assumption is that the capacity to overcome the threat of destruction and to bring about a new era of hope rests, to a great extent, on the hands of both Europe and Japan.

Several arguments could confirm this assumption. The very first would be the rôle of the independent powers in the precarious bloc balance of today. It would be possible to elaborate about the necessity to create a new attitude capable of giving foundation to a new concept and practice in the field of the dispositives of security. The question at stake would, then, be to help decelerating the arm's race of the super-powers and to counter-act the arm's trade in which so many countries spend the greatest part of their budget. ~~Dissuasion and deterrence~~ - a task for those who put human survival above everything else.

Common security and mutual trust are the ethical attitudes to oppose to the "mutual terror" of dissuasion and deterrence - a task ...



Another argument would deal with the technological and economic exchanges both regions maintain with the other regions of the world. The influence of the Japanese products in the world market and the fascination they evoke for Japan-based technology (shown, among other indicators, in the number of patent applications of Japanese firms abroad, including the USA) as well as the privileged position Europe maintains with many countries in the world (e.g. the Lome Convention countries, the Commonwealth countries) could be used in ways other than the mere expansion of markets. Several juridical devices could be put at work so as to enable not only a free transfer of ecological know-how but also "an ecological conditionality" to all new technological endeavours.

These two paths are very important - they belong to the strategical reasoning. However, I won't follow them in this paper. I rather want to address myself to the transition in conceptual framework and in societal structure in which both regions find themselves. It is my belief that such a transition offers a tremendous opportunity for new terms of reference of human knowledge to emerge and for new paradigms of social organization to gain shape and momentum. Survival of mankind needs both.

2. Powerlessness in face of knowledge

The quantitative accumulation of knowledge which has taken place since World War II can be seen in everyday life both in Europe and in Japan. The population in general, the political and entrepreneurial decision-makers and, sometimes, even the thinkers seem to take for granted that such quantity of new knowledge is but a new step in linear development, easily labelled as "modernization".



Such is not the case. In fact, what has happened in the last decades is a spectacular qualitative leap in the relation man/knowledge.

Physics and Biology, as sciences, have given birth not only to new ideas and interpretations of reality but also to new materials, to new "beings". Their progress is not only conceptual but also material. In most fields of science, technology takes hold of the new fundamental findings, shapes them into new forms and feeds them back into the knowledge with which it is linked.

Until very recently (10-15 years ago) it was relatively easy to distinguish technology from the science it was connected to. Hence the clear-cut separation in the interiorized value-system guiding man in the pursuit of knowledge: technology could be "good" or "bad" according to the purpose it was used for; science contained always an intrinsic "goodness". Therefore, while man ought to evaluate the consequences of his technological achievements, in science he was urged to know always more and more.

These two norms are today profoundly shaken.

There are technologies which can be named as "bad", because they convey with them the threat of destruction of human beings - such would be, for instance, the technologies for the militarization of outer space or the technologies for the production of programmed human beings.

The knowledge of science itself is not anymore neutral. In the fields of Physics and Bio-genetics, the very act of knowing is inextricably connected with the permanence of human species as it exists and with the survival of the planet.



Thus, in our time, man cannot anymore master knowledge in innocence. Every act of knowledge puts in motion lives, chain-reactions, biological stimuli of great mutations.

The awareness of such helplessness of man creates for the individual person a state of anxiety Which manifests itself in a variety of new civilizational traits. Loneliness takes hold of the person in the most existential form. Hence the frequent reactions of the "what for" of everything, the accumulation syndrom as a shelter from danger, the "now" attitude as a way to deter the frightening futur, the ultimate decision to stop the chain of life.

A new set of values is needed for knowledge to be life-supportive. Personal frontiers for knowledge ask for the realistic appraisal of the limits imposed by the higher values of life. At the personal level, to know becomes also a path to be humble. To know more asks for the presence of mankind at the heart of the act of knowledge. At the societal level, the respect for the basic value underlying all the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acquires a new meaning and becomes a demanding imperative for all progress of knowledge within a nation as well as internationally.

3. High technology - a new era of illiteracy

The speed at which the electronic and robotic industries are entering Europe (having their home-basis in Japan) and the attraction they are exercising on people point out to a phase of broad consumption of electroni devices.

Yet, people are not prepared to deal with these new tools. They don't know the way those tools function, they are not aware of the implications such tools have in their very perception of reality. We can say that a new type of illiteracy is emerging.



5. Europe and Japan - a common future?

First of all, Europe and Japan have a fundamental rôle to play in refining their concepts of the human person so that the relation of man with knowledge will become a source of enlightenment and happiness . In Europe the human person has emerged in all phylosophical schools with a dimension that transcends the simple succession of events and the immanence of facts. In Japan the human person seems to experience his own identity in a deep inter-relatedness with the environment. The blending of these two trends is the pre-condition for facing the new steps to be taken by man in knowledge and technology.

Second, Europe and Japan have to deal with the greatest urgency with the question of new illiteracy. None can do it alone. It is necessary to compare experiences of educative systems as well as to determine which are the channels through which new processes of learning can take place. The irrationality of the masses behaviour and the mismanagement of the leaders at all levels of organization of society can only be met by a learning process in a wide scale. If the planet is not going to be destroyed by some foolish behaviour, it will be because this new illiteracy will have been eradicated.

Thirdly, the tremendous advancement of Japan in dealing with the micro-systems cannot be seen only as a technological wealth. In understanding better the correlation between such mycro-systems and the unspoken model of the web society, both Europe and Japan may find ways to contribute in a decisive way to the re-shaping of modern democracy. Europe can contribute specifically to such task through a serious probing into the evolution of all attempts made by embrionary social movements as well as through other forms of more participative democracy.



Through the combined effect of these efforts Japan and Europe may be able to contribute to a better management of their societies, taking into account the individual and societal changes that have taken place in the last decades. They can be the leading group to help creating conditions for the survival of the planet. The planetary awareness that is a historical given for Europe and a must for Japan today will need to be translated into a concern for other nations and regions of the world.

Both Europe and Japan have now the historical rôle to help to go beyond the "mutual assured destruction" civilization towards a "life-science" civilization in which mind and spirit will acquire their rights in dealing with matter. A higher degree of hominization of human life will be reached.

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