

## TAKING TIME

*When the holidays come or a ray of sunshine emerges, the crowd flees from the city to the beach, from the asphalt to the green. However, all these people who simply leave at the first occasion are the same ones who decided to be part of this life.*

A common characteristic of city dwellers is our desire to escape the city environment, in search of rest and breathing space, and to experience a slower pace of time. This is perhaps because many of us feel in a rush without knowing exactly why.

Daily life compels us to move quickly from one event to the next. It makes us think that all the idle moments in between are wasted time. Therefore, we tend to not value those moments that actually constitute a *before* and an *after*. But in fact, these moments should give us time to take stock of what has happened, contemplate what will occur and to allow time for ourselves, even if we risk of getting bored.

The vision of contemporary time set out by Byung-Chul Han, in his philosophical essay 'The Perfume of Time', is a time without narration. It is without narration because we have lost the ability to experience duration. Everything has become ever faster. Communication is instantaneous, thus destroying the notion of space. We live in a news culture, or more specifically an information culture. The profusion of news and information allows us to jump from one event to another without at any time confronting ourselves. The relevance of each individual piece of information is lost in a mass of data.

Each of us is desperate not to miss anything. Our aim is to have a good life by experiencing as many things as we can, by filling our time with as many encounters and material objects that the world has to offer. This desire to experience things faster ironically accelerates our passage towards death.

The capacity to slow down seems to have disappeared. People are increasingly inclined to experience boredom in a world always filled with events. In his book *Alienation and Acceleration*, the sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa describes how acceleration produces less critical thinking, less imagination and more conformism. This process of acceleration is without doubt spatial, since the urban environment,

directing people's circulation through their daily life, carries historical meanings that affect us on a deep personal level.

The speed imposed on a citizen in late modern society prevents them from retreating for a moment to engage in critical thinking and imagination. As such, they are unable to question whether or not this system is really geared towards the fulfilment of happiness. According to the French writer Pierre Rabhi, happiness is the most reasonable collaborative achievement society should aim for. Rabhi reminds us that we should 'work to live and not live to work'. Matching his words to action he exposes his view of a 'good life' in his book *Towards the Happy Sobriety*. In this book he details how he put his ideas into practice over the course 45 years of struggle for environmental justice. His respect of all forms of life and his fight against their exploitation contributes to ideas of a more reasonable human organization in which both humans and the environment would both benefit.

Since heaven is still held up as a controverted hope for eternal happiness, the following reflexion is based on western society today, approached from the angle of time and space. These notions are questioned with one vanishing point: how to live a good life.

Accompanying the reflexion there are two further narrated experiences which aim to give the experience of duration in a certain situation. They are small forays into moments where either the constraints of today or steps towards a moderated happiness can be imagined and felt.

If you have already opened this book and allowed this vague beginning to pique your interest, then stay with me a short while longer. Take the time to read it as a conversation I would have truly liked to have had with you, if only both of us had taken the time to meet, sit and talk about what matters to us and what troubles us. The topics of speed, acceleration, guilt, landscapes, happiness and chefs overwhelmed in their kitchen are discussed through the course of the text. See you on the next page.

## WESTERN TIME PREDESTINATION

*As the noise of construction works fill the streets, pedestrians hurry up or put their headphones on to shorten this unpleasant moment. Smoke keeps coming out of the factories and steam escapes from the balding foreheads of overwhelmed chefs in the tropical climax of their fast food kitchen. Luckily, a happy couple, who attentively planned their happiness contemplates with astonishment the result of their love. As they had anticipated, this hopeful September night was followed by a reward in the middle of spring. The baby entered the world in its most glorious season. To complete this vision of the terrestrial Eden, our two middle class lovebirds decided to take a walk in the park, just the three of them.*

In Europe, people have a precise and quite scientific way of measuring time. The year is divided by the calendar and the day is measured by the clock. The consumption of an incense stick or an appointment at sunset are vague romantic notions used in stories. They are part of a mystery we maintain in order to dream about other far eastern cultures. This ability to measure time with accuracy is closely linked to the functionalist system which emerged with the industrial revolution and was then enhanced with the arrival of late modern society.

The technological advancements that have taken place since the industrial revolution were meant to optimise production, reduce labour and promote comfort. Measuring time was a way to synchronise production. Innovations were developed to satisfy the need for ever greater consumption. Despite the promise to free us from labour, these innovations made us even busier. People who saw their lives rapidly improving did not want to arrest these gains. When production intensifies the only way to sell more is either to increase the consumption or to limit the lifetime of an object so that replacements need to be produced: no stock, no delays. The capitalist system does not allow for slowing down or having a break.

Instead of working until the task is done (which was happening faster than before) these innovations push us to deal with more information and carry out more tasks. Acceleration is a phenomenon that has increased tremendously in almost all domains. If it was first made visible with technical innovations such as the train, it is now so spread out and abstract that it has become a stream almost impossible to escape. The exception is natural behaviour of which we have no control. For the domains concerned (economy, relationships, social media, cultural events, communications, global warming...) it is also important to mention that acceleration is not affecting them all equally. One obvious desynchronisation is between the market and politics. Politics is no longer a tool of acceleration, especially in democratic countries in which the political process tries to limit the market in order to maintain some power, like a carriage pulled too fast by

horses that the poor driver struggles to control. At the opposite end, the market tries to accelerate even more the loop between production and consumption by selling and reselling. It is a way of functioning that led to the subprime mortgage crisis, where the fictional increase of values created a massive disconnect with real production. Some politicians have sought to stand against this growing dictatorship of the market. This has met with limited success, for example in Greece, where the government tried to refuse to pay the country's debt to the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

From a larger perspective the phenomenon of acceleration appears to encompass the whole of society, since it galvanizes production, exchange and communications. In this manner, it seems inevitable that it has an impact on people. Critical thinking, true and genuine innovations as much as imagination, comes from quiet moments we have with ourselves, moments free from the stress of duty, professional interests, moments filled up with play, boredom and lounging around. We need to allow ourselves these moments.

Is this lack of genuine free time a result of the late modern condition in general or is this system the manifestation of a visceral unsatisfied nature in man?

Christian guilt is a burden that each person carries as a born sinner. Over centuries it became an intrinsic cultural feature. In our case it brings us to the idea that idleness should create a sense of remorse. In his book *Alienation and Acceleration*, Hartmut Rosa highlights the clash between post-modern society's promise of more freedom on the one hand and its emphasis on duty on the other. For instance, individualism increased with the hope that everyone would have more and more possibilities in terms of life choices. The neoliberal ideology claims that all visions of a 'good life' can cohabit in the same society where no one is told what to do, who to love and where to go. However, temporal norms are silently directing us through deadlines, schedules, pressure, the stress of not doing well and the desire for immediate rewards. On a practical level it is the boss of the restaurant punishing the waiter in front of his costumers. This shaming can be translated to all levels of hierarchy and sometimes manifests without the presence of a real authority or physical confrontation. Pressure and guilt can both be imposed on people by the simple play of speed itself. The feeling of 'I didn't do enough today' or the fear of an eventual

confrontation with the boss if we are late to send the form or serve the plate before it is too cold.

The course of a person's lifetime is also essentially predetermined. Any course that goes against the norm can be considered as alternative, extreme, insane or genius. But in all cases it is considered anachronistic. For instance, in the western world a standard good life involves a 'balanced' education: you go to school until the age of 18 years old; you then take a gap year; between 19 to 25 years old you go to university and take some student job on the side; between 25 and 30 you find a job matching your title and you go up in the company; then at around 35 you get a house, have kids, and so on until you close the circle. Any delay is experienced as a mistake. This average timeline is always playing a comparison role in our mind, despite all the efforts to free ourselves from it. If you are ahead of this line, a little feeling of pride will occur inside you. You will bite your nails if you start your studies all over again when you're 35 or if you fear you have not found the one with whom to start a family.

In the movie *Sans Soleil* (1983), directed by Chris Marker, the narrator says that 'misunderstanding between people doesn't come from the distance that separates them but from a different conception of time.' . Indeed, in some places in Africa people do not know their age. In some parts of India, if you ask at which minute the bus will come the people will answer 'it will come'. With such different visions of time, it is obvious that time changes from culture to culture. In the opening of the movie *Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), directed by Jamie Uys, the western man is opposed to the Bushman people of the Kalahari desert. They live in the rhythm of nature while 'civilised man' constantly hurries and has to teach his children at school for many years before releasing them into the complex world he has created. The gap is growing between the world we create for ourselves and our understanding of it. The faster our society changes the faster this gap widens. This in its turn creates a bigger gap between generations who already have trouble understanding the changes that occur in their own lives without having to focus on the experiences of generations older or younger. Is this constant rush for growth and wealth the way to happiness?

If time is the fundamental element of all these changes in all kinds of fields its most obvious manifestation is in labour. Work is where everyone can

get a tangible sense of this process of acceleration. Obviously, a life consisting of work, with short intervals to regain energy before diving back into it again, might not be very fulfilling. For Byung-Chul Han, contemporary man has become an *animal laborans* (an animal of labour or working animal). He has lost his capacity to experience a *vita contemplativa* (a contemplative life). As mentioned above schedules, deadlines, expectations and guilt force us into an unending cycle of busyness. In this cycle there is no time to raise your head up and linger over something. Labour seems to have become a new dictatorship supported by capitalism where the only feature to improve is one's intellectual capacity. The *animal laborans* is living a *vita activa* (an active life) in which the anxiety, the hyper-action and the restlessness limit one's time to step outside of it and realize its absurdity. However, it is precisely these moments of contemplation, of calm, that allow us to drift away, to imagine, dream and generate truly original ideas and divergent opinions. Things that are needed for a society in order for it to survive. For instance, despite an increasing number of labour-saving technological innovations year on year, it is worth stepping back in order to observe the influence of these innovations on the planet and its inhabitants and consider whether these innovations really contribute to a genuine societal improvement or if instead they are more like gadgets.

For now, it seems that the time to step back is not often taken. Mass production seems to be running blindly into an ecological wall due to the exhaustion of natural resources. We need only look at the scary changes predicted for the climate in the coming decades to know that this is an image which is not just metaphorical. The future matters less to the economy than the instantaneous benefits of maximum profit. This race, led by labour and capitalism, gives full power to the now. But it remains a pure mechanical vision, aiming to maintain the whole economical system, rolling with work, and in the meantime avoiding any real questioning and true contemplation. When a pause produces a guilty feeling this reaction could also be thought of as part of the process to reach a general wellbeing in harmony with the natural environment. It is in this vein that Friedrich Nietzsche said:

If you would believe more in life, you would give less to the instant. But for now you don't have enough content – and you don't even have enough of it for simple idleness!

### TAKING TIME, A STEP BACK TO GAIN A REAL LOOK ON THINGS

*We were all excited as we were going out of the city. The road sign indicated: 'Dead Sea 80km'. As we were driving, the buildings got smaller and finally disappeared completely. The landscape was now governed by sand, rocks, and earth of different gradients of ochre and white. Thanks to the rain, the first hills of the Negev desert were covered by a thin green layer of plants.*

*Our excitement transformed into contemplation and our minds were cruising softly in the eternal silence of the desert. The camp was installed quickly, as it was only composed of a tent, a basket for the food, a carpet and a fabric in between the branches to offer some shade. We buried all our valuables (keys and wallets). Then, all set, we let ourselves fall into the purest idleness. We proceeded slowly in the salty water, so as not to burn our eyes with a splash, then we covered our bodies with clay. As we walked around looking for a spring of sweet water to rinse ourselves, we stopped for short talks with other people covered in mud whom we probably wouldn't recognise once they were washed. We repeated this ceremonial a few times until one of us started cooking and the others set the fire. After dinner, the fire became a point of gathering for us, but also any wanderer emerging from the dark. Other groups remained after dark but they seemed far away or unreal, as we could only hear them, sometimes calling them with music. Meanwhile the moon rose in a rather fast but imperceptible way, lighting the mountains of Jordan on the other shore. Their reflection in*



*the oily water is as strong as the real one and gives the impression of a symmetrical rocky totem lying down. The desert and the sea had nothing to offer us but their eternal stillness, their silence and vastness. But I had never felt so fulfilled.*

Some things only reveal themselves through duration such as fineness, and delicacy. Everything that isn't graspable by force. Putting yourself in a position where you are not subject to many desires – no other major event than the race of the sun or a lizard passing by – is likely to bring you towards contemplation. Knowing that nothing is about to happen, you accept the situation as it is and both impatience and boredom disappear. They give way to a deeper perspective. Taking time means to be more open to the feeling of time passing by, a realisation that none of us can really grasp but one that we can all sense. Restraining yourself to impose your own speed opens a window onto what arrives of its own accord, like an animal that would flee or a bird which would stop singing at your approach. If you sit down, quiet and still, the singing will come back, a melody you would have missed if you would have done anything more than listening.

At the opposite of taking time is acceleration, which has an effect on space. It gives us a feeling of weightlessness. It projects us into a realm of constant events, like free electrons quickly going from one place to another by illogical bounds. When slowing down, the feeling of gravity comes back. Time is inextricably linked to space. Therefore, a study on how the feeling of acceleration is affecting wellbeing needs to include a reflexion on space as well. Thus comes the notion of space-time as one entity. According to the author Henri Laborit, in his book *Eloge de la Fuite*, there is only one way to think about these two inseparable notions: 'since Einstein we know that we can only talk about space-time. [...] The properties of space depend on the speed need to cross it.' For humans these speeds and distances are compared to their lifetime in a final extent. 'How many square centimetres of the earth will our feet cover during our lifetime?' asks the writer Georges Perec in *Espèces d'Espaces*. In this manner these factors give us the boundaries of our possibilities. The horizon used to be an unreachable dream and even made us afraid of an endless fall from the edge of the world. This same world became smaller

when men discovered its astonishing roundness. The priority of space over time in human consciousness has recently been reversed. We can now send a mail at light speed or fly to India in a few hours. Since the first steam train all the way to the internet, the notion of space has shrunk considerably, whereas humans only increased their size by a few centimetres. On the other hand, the number of years in a human life has increased exponentially. According to the theory of space-time there should be different rhythms according to different scales of life. A time for ants and cells, another for stars.

As mentioned earlier, contemplation is a moment of thinking in a sense deeper than the wonderful cerebral achievement practised at work. It is a space for questions, wonders, random thoughts and feelings, a moment where you do not direct but rather let your spirit drift away with the unexpected influences of your surroundings. By contemplating, the world will start to 'speak' to you, like the bird who will continue singing if you only stay quiet and don't scare it away. When the world is too distant from you, making you feel alienated, it is then that life loses its meaning. Unfortunately, this is the coldness where the horses of growth, driven by the rationality of labour, are leading us to.

With the act of taking time, duration appears. The strength of the obsessive present becomes weak in relation to the immensity of the past and future surrounding it. From my experience, as I was simply sitting and thinking during my journey to the Dead Sea, I came to wonder about things possibly occurring soon and long after my own death. It was not a moment of sadness but an honest acceptance of my own ephemerality and a curiosity about what comes next. The same realisation often happens in the opposite direction. Looking at the past we want to learn about history, about where we have come from. Things may become a little less scary as we take the knowledge of books as an anchor to truth. Once again rational understanding acts like a boundary surrounding our free mind and autonomous thinking. This does not happen with the far away future, for which you can only have a vague feeling of momentous intuition and improvable speculations. If we can not change the past, we can still invent the future. Such thoughts about projects and changes going over our own end are very important to ensure the survival and development of a society, at least if we care about its perpetuity.

On a personal level, taking time is also vital for building a sense of

individuality, mainly because it allows us to become acquainted with the particular body each of us has been given, as a main tool with its own limits in terms of senses, movement and sustainability. The discovery of this last feature of the body is called the awareness of death. All those manifest without revealing themselves when we take time and let the world speak to us. Indeed, it would be a presumptuous and vain effort to look for the answers to the questions ‘who am I?’, ‘what is the purpose of life?’, ‘does love truly exist?’

In the public talks he began giving throughout the world from the late 1960s, the Indian philosopher, writer and thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti sent repeated invitations to meditation, a practice or state that could be comparable to the contemplative state we mention here. All the deep questions just quoted and all kinds of deep human wonders involving feelings do not necessarily have an answer and nor do they need to be understood in order to live a good life. They can just be felt and accepted. One must not enter meditation with the desire to find the response to the meaning of life. Instead one should let the encounter with the world come by itself. Thoughts will then come and go. It is important to leave any trace of ego and preconception behind in order to let as many things as possible pass through ourselves, showing their true nature and maybe revealing some dark parts of ourselves. It might disappoint us and disturb the flattered vision we made up of ourselves as we discover the true motivations behind our actions and reactions.

However, this ritual of passage is worth it as we tear apart our individuality and enter duration. Our own esteem suddenly becomes quite ridiculous compared to the infinite landscape of time, on which we only inhabit a grain of its desert. Without explanation, duration carries in itself a reason: an agreeable feeling of life in a larger scale, suitable enough to make us accept our ephemerality. Even though our western cultures intend to make us rely more on our intellectual side, I believe that the acceptance of these everlasting questions can only be brought through our feelings. As Pierre Rabhi argues with regret, spirituality is now sadly thought of as an old obscurantism. The same goes for an artist who wants to represent an idea or a feeling. This person does not need to understand all the insights of a subject in order to be allowed to create a work about it. As the artist took the time to be touched sincerely by these things, he or she can express his or her view on it, not as an answer but as a manifestation, to be shared in the common human experience.

So let's take time, meditate, contemplate. If I use words such as 'contemplative', 'peaceful' or 'calm', they are meant in the sense of self-balance within ourselves. The body need not be completely still nor the mind as empty as possible for them to be in resonance with the world. It was Plato's belief that action helps thinking. He therefore used to walk in order to think. His academy was a garden in which you could wander and wonder. In *The Perfume of Time*, Byung-Chul Han takes up this idea by saying that the *animal laborans* should learn to regain a *vita contemplative*, which is important to balance with a *vita activa* (active life): a time for thinking, a time for doing. Some monks go for long meditations and fasts to forget their body, whereas some dancers can only reach such moments through continuous movement. There are therefore many ways to get to the feeling of duration and the contemplative state. However, the question of location remains.

'If time is linked to space where can I find these peaceful moments of dialogue with myself and my environment?' asks the impatient and irritated soul. The answer is not in the city, or at least not in its busy streets or public places. The impression of calm should come with a security from either being suddenly pulled out of it or seeing someone violating this moment into which we have given so much care and value. Despite the city containing buildings and monuments it is not a place for us to take time. Perhaps churches offer both calm and security for some people. Monuments carry narration within themselves, thereby offering two valuable functions: on the one hand, conductor for human history or the collective memory; and on the other, narrator, in its purest form, of an infinite path in time that brings the feeling of duration. These two features are presented by the anthropologist Marc Augé in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*:

The monument, is an attempt at the tangible expression of permanence or, at the very least duration. [...] They thus enable people to think in terms of continuity through the generations. Without the monumental illusion before the eyes of the living, history would be a mere abstraction. The social space bristles with monuments - imposing stone buildings, discreet mud shrines - which may not be directly functional but give every individual the justified feeling that, for the most part, they pre-existed him and will survive him. Strangely, it is a set of breaks and discontinuities in space that expresses continuity in time.

The continuity and narration of history is paradoxically maintained by fixed events that segment it. To contemplate would be to realize this fracture and to meditate would be to try to rebind time and space into the feeling of a continuous whole. Duration and the link between *past* and *future*, create a meaning for life that can be felt in meditation. In terms of space the vision of unity helps to fight what Marc Augé calls 'non-places' presented as places that do not speak to us anymore. In the city especially, places and monuments are important anthropological links to identity, community and history. But some of them have become distant. They no longer bring any feeling of belonging to a society. 'The landscape distances itself.', says Marc Augé. This is either because they have become too specific (e.g. supermarkets) or too ill-defined, or their speed and standardisation separates the passenger from the world (fast forms of transport). According to this theory, these places are strictly neither places nor non-places but rather they can transition, due to their link to the community, varying during different hours and uses throughout the day. Such places maintain a continuous relationship with neither human history nor the world and therefore automatically drop out of the list of the possible spots for contemplation as they cannot engender a unified view.

Still, there are many possible places left in the city in which one can create a little corner, a niche where one can pause and contemplate. If the conditions of a good environment for a meditative moment differ according to each person, the only way for me to pursue this idea is to expose my own vision of such a place and how it affects me. How can the place I am going to mention help me to come to this peaceful and enriching state of mind? If one considers that this contemplative research matters then it is worth knowing which kind of places are likely to affect you in this way. Moreover, it is important to study how the body, as the first tool to experience their spatiality and any other sensitive particularity (light, smell, ground...), is connected to these places.

First of all, I would like to mention Mother Nature. The blue planet who does not even blush anymore, as her praise has been repeated so many times that she might see it as a kind of conformism concealed by romance. As I see it, natural landscapes are slowing down the tune of our daily life through their horizontality. They lie still and strong like the primary monuments which saw us being born and will survive many generations. However, such places must be experienced in their own scale, biological rhythm and temporality. Of course, they overwhelm us by their

slowness as much as their infinity. We need to stop the car, get out, and walk in them, spend time in them without any external help and accept our inferiority and limits in relation to them, just as we should enter our inner kingdom naked. These notions can hardly be understood in a cognitive sense as they must be lived and felt. It is in that realm, between science and poetics, that the writer and philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in his book *The Poetics of Space* intends to enlighten the ‘correspondence of the immensity of the space and the world with the depth of the “inner space”’. By not doing so, the spectator becomes self-focused.

On this last point, Marc Augé takes the example of a tourist coming to a viewpoint recommended by his guide. He is told to comfort himself by looking at the view he expected. The spectator is therefore the spectator of himself and nothing else. He is already closed to the subtle whisper of the world. To take a more positive example, the wanderer comes with an open mind and well-packed kit with everything he needs to hike or set up a camp. These needs should correspond to a survival minimum, since we have talked about a disinterested pursuit of basic harmony with the world and ourselves. In other words, this wanderer suggests re-establishing the link between Man and Earth. Quite a clear topic when considering how many TV shows and movies explore this theme.

This point of view is emphasised in Kenneth White’s concept of ‘geopoetics’. Founded in 1989 in France, the movement surrounding geopoetics calls for all disciplines to rebound the man and the world in order to create new existential philosophies. This theory-practice implies technical solutions, for instance in ecology, but also a poetry towards the world, stressing the fact that imagination and dreams projected by men are not to be neglected. In a period where time is so condensed and confusing, finding a place for intimacy becomes a matter of urgency. It is vital in order to preserve our collective and personal identity as well as our free thinking and poetry, these things being what makes man such a rich creature. They are at least as much if not more urgent than determining all kinds of dates, schedules for stocks of production, and calculations to improve economic growth. Gaston Bachelard would surely agree.

Happiness comes with the peace made with existential questions and not with their answering. To illustrate this thought, Jiddu Krishnamurti tells the story of a man who meditated all his life in all different manners but never solved the secret hidden behind meditation. Rather than being

attentive, he was always blinded by his desire to know the answer. As he approached his last days, no answer to the meaning of life and death had yet emerged. Out of despair he went to Jiddu Krishnamurti and implored him to reveal the answer. Jiddu Krishnamurti found the situation very sad, the quest for the cognitive understanding of the world blinded this man to the simple evidence that there is no answer. Meanwhile, he had forgotten to live and be present, attentive to every moment of his life.

With this perspective, instead of a straight road, time becomes a country path which does not really lead anywhere, an image that the philosopher Martin Heidegger also uses. Byung-Chul Han analyses this idea of the country path as a representation of a *vita contemplativa*, a life with duration where time is taken to look at things. It is the place for a contemplative journey without any goal. For me, the idea of countryside is to be taken literally. When looking for a place in which to harmoniously blend a *vita contemplativa* and a *vita activa*, the picture of a small village surrounded by nature seems reasonable to me. To look for this happy harmony means to find a place for it where rest and labour can cohabit in a good balance. The practices of its inhabitant being also linked to the location's specificities (agriculture is the first example), it reinforces the link with the land as part of the individual and collective identity. By bonding with this piece of earth, people make it a real 'place' and charge it with memories and attachment.

But how to measure the relevance of a place? If all these sensitive factors have to be taken into account, productivity is not the only scale. As Gaston Bachelard writes, all places need to be re-evaluated so as 'to determine the value of human spaces of possession, defended places against opposing forces, loved places. [...] The space grasped by imagination cannot remain the neutral space given to the measurement of the geometer. It is lived. And it is not lived in its positivity but in all partialities of imagination.'

Indeed, if a landscape or nature can bring the conditions needed for contemplation it also has to include all the necessary requirements for an active life. After all, a good life first needs to be lived, and one of the basic manifestations and experiences of life is physical movement. However, since a place needs to be lived in order to resonate with us, we have to be able to stride across it. It is the movement itself in the space that creates the feeling of life and binds us to it, as we start knowing every rock, every ditch to avoid and every tree under which to enjoy some shade. It has to be

a place we cherish, a piece of nature we love, so that when we stop and contemplate we can gaze enraptured at the path we have walked, the view we have of our house and the landscape unfolding all around us.

This is of course my personal view. It obviously does not match with the accelerated ways many of us live. It is a vision questioning what we should keep from today's society and what we should abandon. In this manner, Pierre Rabhi proposed the idea of 'happy sobriety'. As he looked for well-being his search led him to think about the true goal and utility of new innovations and inventions, the fight of scientists to always push past human limits. And for what? This behaviour only sets ever higher records to beat in a tournament with ourselves. Are productivity and technology really the main needs of the developed countries? Or is it time to think first about a more moderated life which is respectful towards the planet and its resources while still responding to human needs? The word 'economy' would then have to be reconsidered according to its original meaning, closer to saving and moderation rather than growth. Having made this claim, Pierre Rabhi praises a more sober life where each person contributes of his or her own accord to a vision of life that listens to ecology, the world, compassion and the pursuit of global happiness. It is not a violent instantaneous revolution but rather a life choice that everyone is free to take in a personal way. It aims to slowly, collectively change the global way of living.

I modestly join this cause as I see it as an urgent need regarding the ecology and the survival of humans in future generations. But I also see it as an improvement in human intelligence and sensitivity. Listening to our real needs shows that we don't need much to survive and a little bit more is already enough to be happy. It acknowledges the vital material needs (food, house, warmth...), without being in tune with all the clocks, alarms and schedules, but rather with our biological rhythm. Happiness requires even less when it is about projecting poetry into the world. Escaping overabundance opens up possibilities for the daily rediscovery of essential pleasures. It could also help create a fairer redistribution of resources over the world, or at least between neighbouring regions. As a butterfly effect, this sober individual choice of living would have a collective benefit on global happiness.

I sincerely hope that the next experience I will narrate will be located in a place where the life rhythm harmonises with mine: a place to feel at home,



where I can be sensitively attached to the environment and its people, and fed by its soil. Such a life in such a place would preserve the glow of essential pleasures and soften the fear of human impermanence. Life would regain its superior sacred position and dethrone the western man who put his reason above all spirituality and poetry. Man could thus contemplate life not as an amount of time running out too fast but rather as an infinite country path on which each of us dwells serenely before stepping out of it in harmonious rhythm.